

Private Poles and Powerlines

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- > Essential Energy routinely inspects privately-owned power poles and powerlines as part of its regular network asset risk management program, and in accordance with the Electricity Supply Act 1995 and Electricity Supply (Safety and Network Management) Regulation 2014.
- > The Act requires that consumers' installations – which may be referred to as your 'private poles', 'poles and wires' or 'overhead private aerial consumers' mains' and include pole-top fittings such as cross-arms and insulators – must comply with the relevant safety standards and remain safe while connected to the network.
- > Power poles and overhead powerlines that are not properly maintained can pose a serious bushfire hazard or a significant electrical safety hazard to our employees, your property, and the broader community.
- > Disconnection of the installation, or parts thereof, may be necessary if an unsafe situation is detected and not rectified in a timely manner by the property owner.

What does Essential Energy inspect?

Essential Energy's asset inspectors undertake regular patrols of your privately-owned power poles and overhead powerlines. Essential Energy generally does not inspect privately-owned sub-mains – the low voltage overhead powerlines that extend beyond your main switchboard or metering unit. We may inspect some sub-mains beyond the main switchboard or metering unit that are in a continuous overhead line from Essential Energy service mains, or aerial consumer mains that are able to be easily seen by the Asset Inspector.

Why do you need to access my private property?

We need to carry out these inspections to help protect our employees, your property and the broader community from bushfire and electrical safety hazards. While our asset inspectors may be able to complete some visual above-ground inspections from the property boundary, ground-based inspection requires close observation from the base of the power pole.

Do I have to give Essential Energy access?

Yes, Essential Energy is authorised to enter private property to carry out inspections to ensure the ongoing safety and reliability of the electricity network. We will provide you with written notification prior to accessing your property to carry out necessary work. We will also ask about any special access conditions that our asset inspectors need to observe. You can help facilitate this by calling 13 23 91 and checking that we have your correct contact details recorded.

What proof do I have that the person accessing my property works for Essential Energy?

Essential Energy employees and contractors carry photo identification cards. If you are at your property at the time of the inspection, you can ask the asset inspector to show you their identification card.

Do I need to be at the property for the inspection to take place?

You don't need to be present for the inspection. However, if our inspectors are likely to be restricted from accessing your property – for example by locked gates, livestock or dogs – please let us know and we will work with you to complete our inspection.

How can I tell if I have a private power pole or other private assets?

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Private poles should have a plaque with PP followed by an asset number attached to the pole to indicate Private Pole. As we progress our asset inspection program, we will ensure that all private owned poles have a PP plaque on them to indicate private ownership. We are informing customers as we identify private poles as part of our ongoing inspection programs. If you have any questions about your private poles, please contact us.

I've only recently installed my privately-owned power pole and / or powerlines. Will you still need to inspect them?

Yes, these inspections are part of an ongoing program to reduce the risk of electrical safety hazards and electricity network- initiated bushfires.

I have a private pole, can I have it removed?

If you no longer require power to a part of your private network, Essential Energy can de-energise the power supply. Removing any private assets will need to be completed by an ASP and will be at your expense. A full list of ASPs can be found <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/households/guides-and-helpful-advice/being-more-energy-efficient/understand-your-energy-bill/altering-supply>

I have sold my property which has a private pole, do I have to notify Essential Energy that the ownership has changed?

Please contact your electricity retailer to let them know your new address details and we will receive this update.

Who is responsible for inspecting privately owned poles and powerlines?

These inspections are carried out by Essential Energy free of charge to help keep the community safe. We will not charge you to inspect your privately-owned consumers' mains.

However, Essential Energy expects property owners to organise their own regular inspections:

- annually, before each bushfire season
- after major storms, or
- if they suspect any damage.

The inspections you arrange should include any sub-mains on the property that may provide power supply to a pump or a shed.

This may include:

- organising a licenced electrician to regularly inspect, maintain and, where necessary, promptly repair electricity equipment including power poles, powerlines and pole-top fittings on your property, and / or
- engaging a qualified tree trimming contractor to maintain safety clearances between trees and power poles or powerlines.

You can find more information on our website at www.essentialenergy.com.au/privateassets, or by calling Essential Energy on 13 23 91 to discuss your individual circumstances.

Why do I have to maintain the private poles located on my property?

Essential Energy installs and maintains the electricity network up to the connection point on your property. After this connection point, any power poles, powerlines and other electricity assets are your property which you are responsible for maintaining, in the same way you look after the electrical wiring in your home. This helps reduce serious bushfire hazard or a significant safety risk to people or property. You can read more about private poles at www.essentialenergy.com.au/privateassets

Why doesn't Essential Energy just fix the private poles?

Under the Australian Energy Regulator's Ring-Fencing Guidelines, maintenance and rectification of private poles is considered *contestable* work, which helps ensure local businesses can provide a competitive price for some types of electrical work. This means that Essential Energy cannot normally maintain and repair private poles, so you must engage an appropriately-qualified Accredited Service Provider (ASP) to undertake the work. In some cases, if there are no local service providers, or the customer has not complied with our request to repair their private poles, Essential Energy will undertake the work at the customer's expense.

You can find more about this here <https://www.essentialenergy.com.au/about-us/customer-and-regulatory-information/ring-fencing/provider-of-last-resort>

You can find a list of ASPs here <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/households/guides-and-helpful-advice/being-more-energy-efficient/understand-your-energy-bill/altering-supply>

How will I know if there are defects on my network assets?

If an Essential Energy employee identifies any hazards or defects on your private power poles, we will notify you in writing and advise what work is required to rectify this and the timeframe in which it must be done.

What typically results in a defect notice?

Defect notices for overhead consumers' mains often relate to trees or branches growing too close to your private power poles and powerlines, frayed wires or other faults on your installation, or alterations or additions to existing connections which do not meet the necessary safety standards. Power poles in poor condition and at risk of collapse may also be identified in a defect notice. The notice we send you will contain relevant details about any defects our asset inspectors have identified on your private power poles or overhead powerlines.

What do I need to do if I receive a defect notice?

Please implement one of the following options to ensure that your electrical installation is safe:

- Engage a suitably qualified electrical contractor or Accredited Service Provider to rectify the defect/s (your electrical contractor can tell you what qualifications are necessary to undertake the work).
- Arrange for temporary disconnection that safely isolates the defected electrical component. Disconnection and reconnection fees may apply. (NOTE: Disconnection may not be applicable where the premises occupier is a registered life support customer.)
- Arrange for permanent disconnection and removal of the assets if they are no longer required.

You can obtain further information about your private asset management options on our website at www.essentialenergy.com.au/privateassets, or by calling Essential Energy on 13 23 91 to discuss your individual circumstances.

A list of Accredited Service Providers is available by searching 'contestable works' at www.energy.nsw.gov.au or by contacting Service NSW by phone on 13 77 88 or e-mail via info@service.nsw.gov.au

Who is responsible for defect rectification costs?

As the owner of the property and the privately-owned power poles and overhead powerlines installed on it, you will need to engage an appropriately qualified contractor and pay for any rectification work.

Any work on electrical equipment, including power poles, powerlines and fittings, must be carried out by a licensed electrical contractor. Vegetation must only be cleared by a tree trimmer qualified to work around the electricity network.

The work must be completed to a standard that will ensure that your connection to Essential Energy's electricity network complies with the Electricity Supply Act 1995, Electricity Supply (Safety and Network Management) Regulation 2014, the

Electricity (Consumer Safety) Regulation 2006, Electricity Network Safety Management System and Australian Standards and guidelines.

Please note that it is dangerous and illegal to attempt to carry out any rectification work if you are unqualified to do so.

What's the timeframe for fixing defects?

Under the Electricity Supply Act 1995, Essential Energy must ensure that your defect rectification works are completed within a total of 60 days. To facilitate this, please:

- advise Essential Energy of your intended action to complete the rectification work within 30 days from receipt of a notice, and
- arrange for the works to be completed within 60 days from the first receipt of written notice.

Please note that in a bushfire prone area, if you do not provide advice of your proposed actions within 30 days from receipt of this notice and complete the work in a total of 60 days from the written receipt, the Act allows Essential Energy to enter the property and do the required work on your behalf and recover associated costs from you.

For assets outside of a bushfire prone area, if you do not provide advice of your proposed actions within 30 days from receipt of this notice and complete the work within a total of 60 days, the Regulations allows Essential Energy to disconnect an unsafe installation that poses a public safety risk.

Where the premises occupier is a registered life support customer, Essential Energy will complete the required rectification work and pursue the recovery of the costs associated with the rectification. As an alternative, you can contact Essential Energy and request that the property is disconnected within 30 days of the defect notice being issued.

You can check if your property is classified as bushfire prone with your local council, or at <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/>

Why does Essential Energy give owners 60 days to have power poles repaired?

Private poles which are damaged or need maintenance are categorised according to the level of risk to public safety, and the time given is determined by the Electricity Supply Act 1996 (NSW). If you require more time to complete the work, please contact us on 13 23 91.

If I have more than one power pole that requires repair, do I receive 60 days to repair per pole?

The number of days available to repair any damage to private poles will depend on that pole's risk to landowner and public safety, which will be assessed by our Asset Inspectors. If you have received a defect letter from Essential Energy, and would like to talk to us about it, please contact us.

What if I can't get the work done in the time you've allowed?

If Essential Energy hasn't received a response to a defect notice within 60 days, we may:

- disconnect the property's power supply to remove any safety risk, or
- enter the property to do any required rectification works within a bushfire prone zone.

If Essential Energy carries out the work, we will recover the reasonable cost of doing the work from the property owner.

How will you help customers who can't afford to pay for the maintenance or rectification of their private poles?

Essential Energy understands that people may experience financial stress or hardship and may be unable to pay for necessary work required by Essential Energy - we also recognise that electricity is an essential service.

Our Customer Support policy seeks to minimise the instances of disconnections from the network and protect

public safety. The policy also provides guidelines for identifying, assessing, and supporting customers and is our 'Hardship Policy' for the *NSW Electricity Supply Act* and other legislation that governs Essential Energy. You can read more about our Customer Support Policy at <https://www.essentialenergy.com.au/about-us/customer-and-regulatory-information/customer-support-policy>

Are there any circumstances in which Essential Energy will grant an extension?

In special circumstances, Essential Energy may grant an extension of time (subject to a safety risk assessment and your intended actions to address these matters in a reasonable time). If you require additional time, it is important to make your request as soon as possible, and within the first 30 days' notice period.

My private poles were destroyed in the bushfires of 2019/2020, will I have to pay for them to be rebuilt?

To support customers who suffered extensive loss during the 2019/2020 bushfires, Essential Energy has developed a guide to assist reconnecting to the local power supply. As part of our commitment to empowering the communities in which we live and work, Essential Energy is doing all it can to support customers who were impacted by the 2019/2020 bushfires. As part of this support, any private assets (including aboveground poles and all network assets) will be replaced to their previous installation standard - free of charge - for the owners. Once these are installed, the responsibility for maintenance and rectification costs will return back to the owner.

What if my power pole needs to be replaced?

If you are installing new or replacement private poles, you might like to consider installing underground cable instead. Some of the benefits include:

- reduced ongoing maintenance and installation costs,
- lower bushfire and other public safety risks from overhead line,
- removing the risk of hitting overhead lines or power poles by machinery, trucks or other vehicles
- aesthetic value
- potentially better reliability due to less storm and tree damage exposure

Ensure you contact a suitably qualified Accredited Service Provider before proceeding and then your local Council and Essential Energy to discuss your options before proceeding.

Are there any circumstances in which Essential Energy will do the repairs?

You are responsible for arranging for the required work to be done by a licensed electrician or qualified tree trimming contractor. However, if Essential Energy asset inspectors identify an immediate risk to life or property from your private power poles and powerlines, we may need to disconnect your power supply until the immediate safety risk is resolved.

Additionally, in certain circumstances – for example, in bushfire-prone areas or where the premises occupier is a registered life support customer – Essential Energy may enter the property and do the required work on your behalf, and recover associated costs from you. Flexible payment plans or other financial options may be available for customers experiencing financial hardship in accordance with Essential Energy's Customer Support Policy.

You can find more information about this on our website at www.essentialenergy.com.au/privateassets, or by calling Essential Energy on 13 23 91 to discuss your individual circumstances.

My electrical connection has been the same for years. Why have I been given a defect notice now?

Some problems are not immediately apparent and can only be identified through annual inspection by qualified inspectors and contractors. Alternatively, some change may have resulted in a recent defect – for example, vegetation may have grown too close to your powerlines, or an equipment component may have failed. Once a defect has been identified, it is important that it is addressed promptly to reduce the risk of bushfires or electrical hazards posing a threat to our employees, your property and the broader community.

Why am I responsible?

As a community, we share responsibility for reducing the hazards or risk of bushfires that an electrical installation may pose.

Essential Energy is responsible for maintaining and repairing the electricity network to the connection point located on private land.

You are responsible for the safe maintenance and operation of Low Voltage power poles and powerlines between the first point of connection on your property to the switchboard or meter and those that extend into your property, and you must ensure they are safe and properly maintained. This may include organising a licenced electrician to regularly inspect and maintain electricity equipment including power poles, wires and pole-top fittings on your property, or engaging a qualified tree trimming contractor to maintain safety clearances between trees and power poles or powerlines.

You can find more information about asset classification and these shared responsibilities on our website at www.essentialenergy.com.au/privateassets, or by calling Essential Energy on 13 23 91.

I'm only renting. What are my responsibilities?

Both property owners and tenants are responsible for the safe maintenance and operation of electrical installations located on their properties. While it is the property owner's responsibility to comply with any direction included in a defect notice, if you are a tenant, you should forward the letter of notice to the property owner or your landlord as soon as possible, and follow up until the matter is resolved. Please contact Essential Energy on 13 23 91 if you are unable to contact the property owner or your landlord.

I'm a landlord. What are my responsibilities?

Property owners and occupiers are responsible for the safe maintenance and operation of electrical installations located on their premises. Essential Energy expects this to include the ongoing maintenance and inspection of their private power poles, powerlines and related fittings, and the removal of vegetation growing too close to powerlines. If you or your tenant has received a defect notice relating to your premises, it is your responsibility as the property owner to comply with the direction.

Why can't I trim the trees near my powerlines myself?

Live powerlines are extremely dangerous and contact with them can be fatal. Electricity can also arc across an air gap, so you don't have to be touching powerlines to receive an electric shock. Tree trimmers qualified to work around the electricity network have special training and equipment to help keep themselves and the community safe. Please do not attempt to do this work yourself.