

AB 615: Energy Facility Applications

Assemblymember Laurie Davies

IN BRIEF

AB 615 would require any applicant wanting to operate an energy storage facility must submit with its initial application to the California Energy Commission an emergency response & action plan in the event of a disaster. This plan must include recommendations and feedback from local first responder and emergency agencies.

THE ISSUE

California has cemented itself as a leader when it comes to environmental goals and technology to achieve those goals. One critical piece to achieve those goals is by constructing state of the art energy facilities to ensure we have safe spaces to deposit excess energy, including battery power. However, with this state of the art technology must come public safety protections.

In 2023, the California Legislature passed SB 38 which mandated that all battery energy storage facilities come up with an emergency response and action plan. While this is a great first step, the legislation only applied to facilities currently running. It did not account for those in the state application process. More should be done to account for all types of energy facilities and how we can help local communities prepare for a disaster.

A lithium-ion battery fire at the Moss Landing Power Plant in California led to an evacuation in January. Monterey County officials confirmed that the fire released a plume containing hydrogen fluoride. This incident renewed concerns about how close energy storage facilities should be to residential communities and vegetation sites.

As the technology behind energy storage systems continues to evolve, new safety challenges may emerge. It's important to stay ahead of these developments by continually updating safety standards and conducting thorough risk assessments. These assessments should be done in coordination with local emergency responders early on in the process to determine if a proposed site is safe enough.

CURRENT LAW

Public Utilities Code 761.3 requires that each battery energy storage facility located in the state have an emergency response and emergency action plan that

covers the premises of the battery energy storage facility. The plan must be developed in coordination with local emergency agencies.

Public resources Code 25520 requires an application to the California Energy Commission for the operation of an energy facility to include, amongst other things, safety & reliability information about the facility for emergency operations.

THE SOLUTION

AB 615 is a common-sense public safety measure to mandate that not only shall an emergency action plan be submitted with the initial application for the development of a facility, but they also must work with local first responder agencies to receive feedback on if the proposed site is in a safe area and meets national safety standards. This information will be vital for the approving state agencies, such as the Energy Commission.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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