



**SB 705 – Utility Worker Safety**  
*Protecting our Utility Workers*

**SUMMARY**

In order to combat recent public harassment and violence toward utility workers, SB 705 would require the Public Utilities Commission to create and implement a public education campaign on the increased frequency of aggression and violence towards utility workers and the importance of utility workers for safe and reliable electric and gas service.

**BACKGROUND**

Utility workers are essential to dependable, secure electric and gas services in California. However, since the catastrophic wildfires in 2017 and 2018 and the public safety power shutoffs in 2019, the public’s attitude toward utility workers changed and utility workers have experienced increased verbal aggression and physical assaults.

For example, during the October 2019 public safety power shutoffs, a gun was fired at a PG&E worker while driving, shattering the truck’s window.<sup>1</sup> And, in 2021, an SDG&E worker was verbally harassed and physically assaulted while manning a roadblock for an electrical box repair.<sup>2</sup>

Utility workers who respond to customer outages or appliance issues at homes and businesses have heightened risk. Usually, it is an individual worker who responds to these calls, and people who target utility workers are increasingly aware of computers and other equipment these workers carry to perform their jobs, making them a greater target. Threats and assaults to these workers are increasingly common, especially after regular business hours.

**THE PROBLEM**

Utility workers work to provide safe, efficient and reliable electric and gas services to California residents and businesses. Their work is often dangerous, working around gas pipelines and live electrical wires. During emergencies, workers can put in extremely long hours, often during adverse weather conditions.

Over the last few years, utility workers have been the target of intense public anger towards utility companies even though the frontline utility workers do not make company decisions. These workers have experienced harassment, aggression and violence, including verbal threats, physical assaults, and even gun shots. This open hostility puts utility workers at even greater risk and undermines the ability of utility workers to do their jobs.

**THE SOLUTION**

To protect our utility workers and contractors, SB 705 would require the Public Utilities Commission to develop, in consultation with utilities and utility employees’ unions, a five-year statewide campaign to increase public awareness of the harassment of utility workers and contractors. The campaign would be conducted online, through multi-media, and in public spaces. The campaign content would be culturally relevant and conducted in multiple languages.

The bill would require the Public Utilities Commission to evaluate campaign effectiveness at the end of each year of the campaign and prepare a report to be published on its website describing the campaign’s effectiveness, gaps and plans to address the gaps.

Ratepayers would not fund the campaign. Instead, the campaign and associated evaluations and reports would be funded using fines collected by the Public Utilities Commission from electrical and gas investor-owned utilities.

**SUPPORT**

Coalition of California Utility Employees (sponsor)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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<sup>1</sup> [Sacramento Bee Article](#)  
<sup>2</sup> [NBC News Article](#)