



27 April 2017

The Secretariat
Review of Victoria's Electricity Safety Network
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
Victorian State Government
Melbourne VIC 3000

By email: delwp.secretariat@delwp.vic.gov.au

Dear Madam

Re: Review of Victoria's Electricity Safety Network – Issues Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Review of Victoria's Electricity Safety Network – Issues Paper* (the Paper).

The Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) is an industry-based external dispute resolution scheme that helps Victorian energy or water customers by receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about their company. Much of what EWOV provides in this submission has already been discussed with The Secretariat and Chair of the Review, however we think it's important to formally restate our experience on the public record. This submission provides an analysis of those EWOV cases that potentially concern an electricity safety issue, with a particular focus on cases we received in 2016.

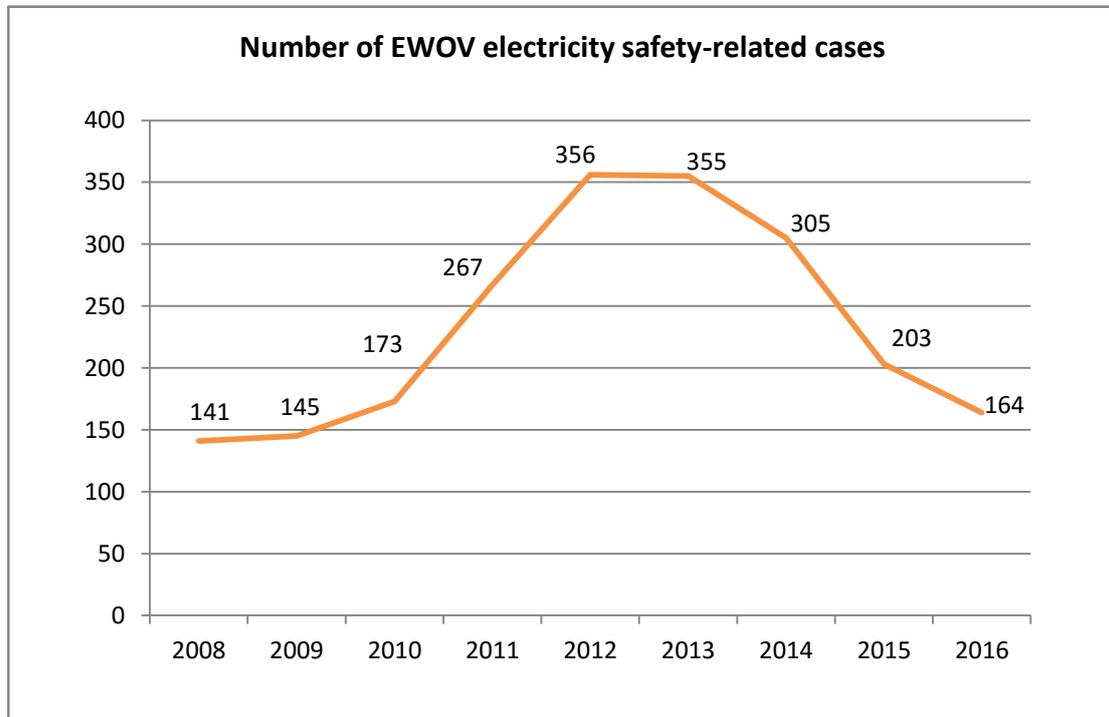
EWOV electricity safety-related cases

The graph below shows the number of EWOV cases involving an electricity safety issue from 2008 to 2016¹.

¹ The EWOV case data used to populate this graph combined the following EWOV case issue categories:

- Land > Network Assets > Health and Safety
- Land > Vegetation Management
- Provision > Disconnection/Restriction > Safety/Defect
- Provision > Existing Connection > Safety
- Supply > Off-Supply – Planned > Health and Safety
- Supply > Off-Supply – Unplanned > Health and Safety
- Supply > Quality > Health/Safety
- Supply > Variation > Health and Safety.





The Victorian smart meter rollout was the major driver for the rise and fall of EWOV’s electricity safety-related cases. The rollout began in 2009 and reached its peak activity in 2012 and 2013. Similarly, EWOV’s electricity safety-related cases peaked in 2012 with 356 cases received that year. This relationship is shown in the graph above.

When installing a smart meter, distributors are authorised to give the customer a defect notice (and sometimes disconnect their supply) due to a safety concern with the customer’s electrical assets, such as the Point of Attachment, wiring, mains box or fuse. Generally, the inconvenience of the defect notice and the cost of fixing any unsafe fixtures were the main reasons customers would call EWOV for assistance.

The complaint issues behind EWOV’s electricity safety-related cases

The following table briefly describes and summarises the type of customer concerns raised in the 164 electricity safety-related cases EWOV received in 2016, refined by their main issue type.





EWOV issue category	Number of cases in 2016	Main customer concerns
Land > Network Assets > Health and Safety	17	<p>A variety of issues, mostly concerning power poles and lines, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• power poles leaning at an angle• fallen trees and branches near power lines• claims of unsafe or 'live' powerlines• possum disks to stop possums on powerlines• power pole safety• deterioration of a fence around a sub-station• raising power lines• smart meter noise• public lighting not working• a 'suppressant gas' was released to contain a fire at a battery sub-station. The gas mistakenly covered some neighbouring properties• electric shock from a power line induction leak• asbestos in an electricity pit.
Land > Vegetation Management	25	<p>Almost all these cases concerned customers who were worried that trees were too close to power lines or unhappy that debris was left at their property after tree and vegetation cutting.</p>
Provision > Disconnection/Restriction > Safety/Defect	52	<p>Most cases concerned the inconvenience of a safety-related disconnection and the cost of fixing a defect notice before the property's supply is reconnected. Often this involved a defect with the customer's Point of Attachment or mains box wiring. We saw a significant increase in these cases when meters were exchanged with a smart meter.</p>
Provision > Existing Connection > Safety	60	<p>About half of these cases concerned customers who believed they were affected by electromagnetic radiation (EMF) from a smart meter.</p> <p>The other half mostly concerned customers unhappy with receiving a defect notice for an unsafe electrical asset, such as wiring, fuses and Point of Attachments – but their supply remained connected.</p>





Supply > Off-Supply – Planned > Health and Safety	4	These cases were mostly about planned outages scheduled for hot temperature days and the potential risk this posed to human health and comfort. Cases also involved customer complaints about planned outages on total fire ban/high bush fire risk days and the risk this posed to livestock and property.
Supply > Off-Supply – Unplanned > Health and Safety	4	These four cases involved miscellaneous matters.
Supply > Quality > Health/Safety	2	These two cases involved miscellaneous matters.
Supply > Variation > Health and Safety	0	None
Total	164	

Number of EWOV referrals to Energy Safe Victoria

In 2016, EWOV referred 11 customers to Energy Safe Victoria as their concerns were outside our jurisdiction to assist. These cases mostly concerned customer queries about the work or credentials of private electricians². We also made concurrent referrals to Consumer Affairs Victoria for these customers, where relevant.

We trust that these comments are useful. Should you require further information or have any queries, please contact Justin Stokes, Senior Research and Communications Advisor on (03) 8672 4272.

Yours sincerely

Cynthia Gebert
Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

² Under EWOV's Charter and Constitution, we can only take complaints about electricity, gas and water companies that operate in Victoria and are members of our scheme. See <https://www.ewov.com.au/about/complaints-we-can-and-cant-take>

