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Powering Down: To Prevent Wildfires, States Try Turning Off the Grid.

COMMENTARY | The trend started in California, but now more states are opting to shut off power to parts of the grid in extreme conditions.

The U.S. power grid is the largest and most complex machine ever built. It's also aging and under increasing stress from climate-driven disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes and heat waves.

Over the past decade, power grids have played roles in wildfires in multiple states, including California, Hawaii, Oregon and Minnesota. When wind speeds are high and humidity is low, electrical infrastructure such as aboveground power lines can blow into vegetation or spark against other components, starting a fire that high winds then spread.

Under extreme conditions, utilities may opt to shut off power to parts of the grid in their service areas to reduce wildfire risk. These outages, known as public safety power shutoffs, have occurred mainly in California, where wildfires have become larger and more destructive in recent decades.

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Route Fifty

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