

Governor's Office of Business & Economic Development
Webinar on Renewable Energy Permitting Initiative & Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)
March 26, 2025 | 9:30am – 12:30pm
SPEAKER BIOS



Banu Acimis leads the Generation section of the Electric Safety and Reliability Branch at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). She has over 20 years of experience working on safety and enforcement at the CPUC and was involved in several large investigations including the San Bruno gas explosion, 2017 Northern California wildfires, and the 2018 Camp fire. Banu is a licensed civil engineer.



Lakshmi Alagappan is a Senior Partner at Energy and Environmental Economics. She co-leads E3's integrated system planning and asset valuation, transmission and markets practices where she supports state agencies, utilities, developers, and investors in planning, financing, siting and permitting assets for decarbonized power systems. Within these practice areas, she advises E3's renewable and transmission planning clients on a wide-ranging set of issues including planning and needs identification, siting and permitting, cost allocation and recovery, and regulatory strategy and policy development.

She is currently overseeing E3's support for the California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development renewable siting and permitting initiative.



Michael Bowes has been deeply involved in the advancement of the national energy storage landscape, with a large focus on battery safety and permitting in New York State and NYC. During his time at Sustainable CUNY of the City University of New York, he worked closely with the NYC Fire Department, Department of Buildings, Mayor's Office of Sustainability to streamline the permitting of energy storage systems. Michael proudly serves on the NYS Inter-Agency Fire Safety Working Group and EPRI Battery Energy Storage Fire Prevention and Mitigation advisory committee. Michael holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Clarkson University.



Justin Kirk is the Deputy Director of Developmental Services at the Orange County Public Works Department. Previously, Justin was a Division Manager, Planning at Orange County, California and also held positions at City of Lake Elsinore CA, City of San Juan Capistrano, City of Cotati. Justin received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Sonoma State University and a Master of Arts from Brandman University, Part of the Chapman University System.



Kristi Mirich has over a decade of experience in the fire service, serving as a fire code official for both local jurisdictions and state agencies. Kristi has honed her expertise in various critical areas, such as pre-fire planning, hazard mitigation, and regulatory compliance. She has led fire life safety approval processes for large facilities, managed complex construction projects, regulated hazardous materials, fire origin and cause investigation, and overseen emergency responses. Her background also encompasses conducting construction plan reviews, and regulatory inspections. Kristi's extensive experience allows her to effectively lead teams, develop fire life safety code methodologies, and tackle intricate safety challenges as a project consultant. She holds numerous certifications from the State Fire Marshal, International Code Council, a BS in Fire Science and a Masters in Public Administration. Kristi currently serves as a Senior Fire Life Safety Code Consultant and Project Manager for GHD.



Rohimah Moly serves as the Deputy Director for Energy and Climate at the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). Prior to joining GO-Biz, Ms. Moly was a consultant at a firm for energy and climate startups. She served in various capacities at several state agencies including at the California Public Utilities Commission, California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, and the California State Treasurer's Office. She is a board member of the Asian Pacific Youth Leadership Project, a civic organization working to increase engagement of Asian Pacific Islander youth in community and public service in California.



Michael Nicholas serves as an Energy Storage Specialist & Fire Consultant with Hiller Companies. Prior to joining Hiller, he worked as a Captain and Assistant Fire Marshal for Kern County Fire Department for 26 years. During his fire service career, he led the development and implementation of their Battery Energy Storage program working closely with leaders in the industry. Currently Kern County has the largest active battery energy storage project in the world at 3.2GWh. He is working with the California Energy Storage Alliance on a campaign to help standardize the BESS submission, permitting and witness testing process in the State.



Le-Quyen Nguyen joined the California Natural Resources Agency in April 2022 as the Deputy Secretary for Energy. In this role, she guides the Agency's energy policies and programs in support of California's energy and decarbonization goals. Before her appointment, Le-Quyen worked at the California Energy Commission, where she held a variety of positions. This included Chief of Staff to the Chair, Manager of the Supply Analysis Office, and special advisor to a Commissioner. Le-Quyen earned a bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences from the University of California, Riverside. When not at work, Le-Quyen enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, and gardening.



Vickie Sakamoto is Assistant Fire Marshal at the Office of State Marshal. Chief Sakamoto brings nearly 38 years of dedicated service to the fire protection and public safety sectors. Prior to her appointment as Assistant State Fire Marshal, Chief Sakamoto served as an Assistant Deputy Director. Chief Sakamoto will oversee the following OSFM' divisions: Code Development and Analysis, Fire and Life Safety, Pipeline Safety and CUPA, as well as State Fire Training. Her role will focus not only on supporting the teams she oversees, but in carrying out the mission, vision, and values of CAL FIRE. Chief Sakamoto will also work towards leading the Office in meeting State Fire Marshal Daniel Berlant's four key expectations: Communication, Customer Service, Consistency, and Trust.

Her fire service journey began in 1986 with the Florin Fire Protection District, where she served as a Fire Prevention Technician. In 1989, she commenced her state service with the OSFM as a Deputy State Fire Marshal, ultimately advancing through multiple leadership positions, including Deputy State Fire Marshal III - Specialist, Deputy State Fire Marshal III - Supervisor, and Division Chief. She has held the role of Chief for both the Fire Engineering Division and the Fire and Life Safety Division, demonstrating a longstanding commitment to safeguarding communities.



Molly Sterkel is the Interim Director for the Office of Electric Supply, Planning and Costs in the Energy Division of the California Public Utilities Commission. Molly oversees a wide variety of policy areas for the CPUC, including general rate cases, generation and transmission planning, renewable portfolio standard, climate initiatives, and transmission permitting. Over the past two decades, Molly has served in a variety of roles at the CPUC, and she has extensive experience working as an innovative policy leader supporting the State to achieve a low carbon future via various policies, initiatives, and programs. Her portfolio as an Energy Division Program Manager overseeing Electric Planning and Market Design between 2022 and 2024 has included managing the teams at the CPUC that oversee the State's various electricity supply and reliability efforts, including the Resource Adequacy program, Integrated Resource Planning processes, interconnection and transmission planning, as well as energy resource modeling.

In 2021, Molly spearheaded the launch of the Tracking Energy Development (TED) Task Force, a joint effort of the CPUC, the California Energy Commission (or CEC), the CAISO, and the Governor's Office of Business Development – in recognition of the need for the State to take a proactive approach to addressing challenges that can arise during energy project development.

In addition to extensive work on generation, transmission planning and procurement at the CPUC, Molly has also worked as a manager, supervisor, or analyst on a wide array of policy issues over the past 2 decades --- including permitting and environmental reviews under CEQA (including transmission, natural gas, broadband, and water projects), electric distribution planning, electric storage, interconnection tariffs and smart inverters, net energy metering, undergrounding, and microgrids. For over 4 years, Molly oversaw distributed generation programs, including qualified facilities, small renewables procurement via feed-in tariffs, the Self-Generation Incentive Program, and the start-up phase of the California Solar Initiative, which included the nation's first low-income solar programs and first net energy metering tariffs for multifamily housing. Prior to joining the CPUC in the mid-2000s, Molly worked in clean energy consulting, co-founded two clean energy related non-profits, and worked as a rates

analyst at Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Molly focused on energy policy when she earned a Master's degree in Public Policy from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.



Suna Taymaz is a seasoned energy and innovation strategist with over two decades of experience driving transformative initiatives across the energy, transportation, and infrastructure sectors. Currently serving as a Critical Infrastructure Leader at GHD—a global professional services firm delivering sustainable engineering, advisory, and environmental solutions—she leads decarbonization and modernization projects for local, state and federal agencies throughout the U.S.

Moe Zarabi, LEED AP-ND, is Senior Land Use/Environmental Planner, County of San Diego Biography. Moe is a Senior Planner working for the County of San Diego's Planning & Development Services with over 20 years of experience in the public sector through various authorities in the southern California region. Currently, under the Building Services Division, Moe helps manage renewable energy and resiliency permitting and green building code programs. Moe published academic studies related to the effectiveness of public policies promoting renewable energy. Moe's undergraduate emphasis was in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Political Science, with graduate work with a Masters of Public Policy from San Diego State University, and Moe is a credited LEED Associate Professional in Neighborhood Design.