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Volcanic Eruptions Pose Threat to Overhead Power Grids

University of Canterbury research suggests that future volcanic eruptions could pose major threats to New Zealand's power supply (Voxy.co.nz, Timaru Herald). Electricity transmission throughout the North Island of New Zealand was severely disrupted when Mt. Ruapehu erupted in 1995. Volcanic ash contamination can cause insulator flashover that is essentially a short circuit which, if large enough, can trip high voltage power line circuit breakers and cause blackouts. This could be a significant problem in New Zealand where all of the country's national power grid is located within a few kilometres of active volcanoes – Ruapehu, Tongariro and Taranaki. (If high voltage power lines were buried, they would not be susceptible to this and many other natural threats.)