

**Wildfire Hearing – Senator Hill**  
**November 18, 2015 – 10:00 am**  
*Opening Statement for Pat Hogan*

- Thank you Senator Hill (if present: and committee members) and good morning.
- At PG&E, our top priority is the safety of our customers, the communities we serve, and our employees. Wildfire poses one of the highest risks to California and PG&E views wildfire as a major public safety risk.
- The past two years have proven to be as challenging as many had forecasted, with record drought conditions in California, exponentially raising the risk of wildfires.
- Over this time period, California has experienced some of the largest and most destructive wildfires and seen them spread at rates never seen before.
- The Butte fire is one of those fires and, as you know, we released a statement on September 16, where we stated that a live tree may have contacted a PG&E line in the vicinity of the ignition point. We are fully cooperating with Cal-Fire on their investigation.
- PG&E's comprehensive risk ranking program quantifies wildfires as the highest risk in our Electric Risk Register.
- We have controls in place for this risk, and we continue to strengthen those controls, especially given the current conditions.
- Each year, we review and refresh our operating risks as part of our Integrated Planning Process. This review process provides an opportunity to evaluate current conditions and measure the progress of our Risk Response Plan.
- PG&E has in place a number of plans and programs to prevent and mitigate the risk of fire ignitions from electric facilities.

**Vegetation Program**

- Our Vegetation Management program is a key program to mitigate the risk of wildfire.
- Each year, we patrol every mile of our system. That's 114,000 miles of distribution line and more than 18,000 miles of transmission lines that have nearly 50 million trees that have the potential to come into contact with power lines.
- By the end of this year, we will have trimmed or removed almost 1.2 million trees.

- Last year, following the Governor declaring a state of emergency and the California Public Utilities Commission directing utilities to take extended measures to address drought-related fire risk, we initiated a six-part response plan of additional mitigations—actions that go above and beyond our existing comprehensive program—to reduce this risk.
- These mitigations include:
  - Additional patrols in high risk fire areas: we have conducted additional and redundant patrols of nearly 44,000 miles of our power lines in high fire danger areas.
  - Pole clearing work in designated Wildland Urban interface areas.
  - Utilizing advanced technology such as LiDAR and spectral imaging in our inspections to detect dead, diseased, and dying trees that could impact our lines, even before they display signs of deterioration;
    - LiDAR shows how tall a tree is and its proximity to a power line. Spectral imagery provides critical information about a tree’s health.
  - Funding \$7.5 million to local Fire Safe Councils over the past two years for fire fuel reduction, improving emergency access roads for rural communities and assisting low-income residents clear defensible space around their properties.
  - Funding remote cameras in lookout towers for early fire detection. One of these cameras even helped rescue a woman who had given birth in Butte County.
  - Funding daily aerial fire patrols from mid-June through the end of October. These flights spotted 146 fires, and in 25 instances, were the first to report the fire to CAL FIRE or the U.S. Forest Service.
  - PG&E is supporting multiple CAL FIRE campaigns asking for the public’s help to reduce the risk of additional wildfires by safely removing or pruning dead or dying trees on their property, including the One Less Spark, One Less Wildfire and Prepare for Bark Beetle awareness campaigns.
- In addition to our comprehensive response to the drought, we continued our Vegetation Public Safety and Reliability program, which concentrates on areas where we’ve had previous outages.
- Overall, we’re on track for the lowest number of vegetation-caused outages and wires down in our history.

- We also established an internal Electric Wildfire Risk Council to assure appropriate engagement, governance, and coordination of wildfire-related activities such as detection, response, and mitigation efforts.

### **Asset Management Program**

- Asset resiliency is another key aspect of our wildfire prevention plans.
  - We conduct annual infrared inspection of all overhead conductors in wildfire areas to identify equipment before it fails.
  - We continue to implement SCADA—Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition—in our wildfire areas. These upgrades will allow for remote disabling of automatic reclosing during extreme fire risk conditions. By the end of next year, we will have this capability across all 132 locations in wildfire areas.
  - Our targeted conductor replacement program focuses on replacing sections of electrical circuits in wildfire areas equipped with small conductor with a higher number of line splices.
  - We are also replacing equipment that has the potential to emit sparks during its normal operation with improved equipment that does not produce sparks.

### **Operational**

- In addition to these activities and programs, we have a wide range of tools we use to help our employees prevent wildfires.
- This year, we increased fire safety awareness training of field and operational personnel who work on facilities or use equipment, tools, or vehicles that could result in wildfires.
- We also disseminate predicted weather and fire threat information daily to employees in order to keep them informed of critical meteorological conditions.
- We also have programs to educate customers and our first responder partners on electric safety.

### **Areas of Opportunity**

- Our future holds several other areas where we will continue to improve how we detect, respond, and mitigate wildfire risk.
- We are currently in Phase One development period for our System Tool for Asset Risk, or STAR, which will help prioritize asset replacement by high priority locations, including wildfire areas.

- Improvements with our Grid Operations Situational Intelligence tool are being implemented to provide our grid operators with a platform to improve real-time decision making in a critical operating environment during the response to wildfires.
- In 2015 we began pre-treating our poles with an approved wildland fire retardant to prevent ignition of the power pole from direct flame impingement or radiant heat.

### **Future Concerns**

- This is where we are today. I'd like to share with you the concerns we have for the next few years regarding this risk.
- During the last two years, extreme drought conditions, along with elevated temperatures and unprecedented rates of insect infestation, have resulted in high mortality rates across all tree species.
- We have several areas in our service territory where tree mortality exceeds 50 percent, creating a continued wildfire risk in the coming years, regardless of whether the drought ends this year.
- As you are aware, the Governor recently declared a state of emergency over tree mortality in our forests related to bark beetles. PG&E will be taking an active role on the Governor's Task Force on Tree Mortality.
- And while PG&E has taken a comprehensive approach to assisting the state in fighting the drought and helping to prevent wildfires, we are continuously striving to improve.
- We have recently taken CPUC staff to see firsthand the level of devastation that the drought and bark beetle infestation have had on forests, particularly in the southern Sierras. I would like to extend an invitation to you and your fellow committee members, to tour these areas to see for yourself these conditions and the challenges the drought presents.
- The safety of our customers and the communities we serve are our top priorities. PG&E is committed to implementing strategies and programs to mitigate the risk of wildfires in California.
- Thank you.