

Power outages, designed to reduce fire risk, burden California counties

By Olga R. Rodriguez
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — When California's largest utility warned it would cut power to thousands to prevent its equipment from starting wildfires during warm, windy weather, officials in the wealthy wine region of Sonoma County sprang into action.

They declared a state of emergency and called up additional first responders who could direct traffic or take vulnerable residents to places with electricity.

Nearly 200 miles north, officials in rural Butte County simply posted Pacific Gas & Electric information online about which neighborhoods would be affected and what to do with perishable food.

Both counties had communities decimated in destructive wildfires in recent years, ignited by power lines. They face the long-term prospect of frequent power shutoffs during fire season as PG&E and other utilities try to prevent their equipment from sparking fires like the one last year that killed 86 people and nearly destroyed the Butte County town of Paradise.

More populated, wealthier counties have adapted their emergency plans to respond to the new reality of thousands of residents losing power for an undetermined amount of time. But the preventive outages are proving to be a burden to smaller, poorer counties without resources to set up places for people to cool off or mobilize staff to deal with emergencies if outages stretch past two days.

"Most of these counties haven't had to deal with this before."

— Darby Thomas, California State Association of Counties

"The outages are to avoid an emergency and a fire disaster, but there are no resources that counties can access to make sure that people are at a cooling station or get the transportation they need to get there," said Darby Thomas, deputy executive director of the California State Association of Counties.

California lawmakers this year set aside \$75 million to prepare local governments for the outages, but officials have yet to decide how to distribute the money.

The outages are new for PG&E and Southern California Edison, which together provide power in 55 of California's 58 counties. The utilities and county officials are working together to figure out their roles, but a lack of standards has led to disparate responses.

This week, PG&E shut off power to more than 48,000 customers in seven counties in wine country and the Sierra Nevada foothills as the humidity plunged, temperatures rose and winds kicked up — a combination that has fueled some of the most destructive blazes in California history.

The outages lasted less than a day, and no major problems were reported.

In Sonoma County, PG&E cut power to 700 people in the Santa Rosa area, where a

massive blaze in October 2017 killed 22 people and destroyed more than 5,000 homes.

The county started planning for power outages shortly after regulators approved them in May, emergency management director Chris Godley said.

"Just like we prepare for an earthquake, or fire season, or flood season, we also prepared for the de-energization because if the power will be out for more than 48 hours, it's really an emergency for the community," he said.

The county's outage plan calls for opening facilities with air conditioning, adding more police patrols to direct traffic after streetlights go out and sending workers to check on those who are sick or immobile.

"Our response philosophy is to ensure maximum and full response immediately because we don't know the level and scope of what's going to happen," Godley said.

In Butte County, where 24,000 customers lost power twice this week, authorities ensured backup generators worked, had staffers ready in case they needed to check on vulnerable people and shared PG&E updates on social media. They planned to rely on two PG&E cooling centers.

"Our role is to make sure the information gets out there because it's really PG&E's thing," county spokeswoman Miranda Bowersox said.

Lake County, home to just 60,000 people in the Sierra foothills where wildfires in recent years killed four people and burned hundreds of buildings,

emergency officials have spent \$500,000 buying and installing generators that can power police, fire, water and sewage services.

It doesn't have the resources to do much more than ensure government buildings are operating during an outage, said Dale Carnathan, county emergency services manager.

As in Butte County, Carnathan said Lake County's focus has been on telling people the location of outages, advising them to buy nonperishable food and generators, and urging them to charge their phones.

"What people need to understand is that local government is not going to be able to come to their rescue," he said. "We need them to take responsibility for their own safety and security, at least for the short term, because we're going to be in the same boat they are in."

Though the outages were brief this week, those longer than two days can strain communities, said Thomas of the counties association. Even after the weather improves, there can be delays as utilities inspect every line before restoring power.

A lot still needs to be done to help counties prepare, including drawing up plans to help people with medical issues or disabilities, she said.

"Most of these counties haven't had to deal with this before," Thomas said. "We're hoping that some of the funds go toward not only buying generators but also helping them plan for these emergencies so they are able to respond."

REGIONAL BRIEFING

Most of Columbia River closed to salmon, steelhead fishing due to low numbers of returning fish

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) — Most of the Columbia River will close to all recreational salmon and steelhead fishing, with the exception of the Hanford Reach.

The Tri-City Herald reports the closure went into effect Thursday.

Bill Tweit, special assistant with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, says it comes at the tail end of a challenging year on the Columbia that saw low returns for many salmon and steelhead runs.

The commercial harvest on the Columbia River will have to be reduced by fishery managers in Washington and Oregon to account for the number of upriver bright Chinook caught during the fall season.

The closure announced this week extends upstream to Highway 395 in Pasco, excluding Buoy 10 at the mouth of the Columbia River for coho retention.

Truck drivers arrested for hauling industrial hemp through Idaho sentenced to probation

BOISE (AP) — Three truck drivers who were originally charged with felonies for transporting industrial hemp through Idaho have been placed on unsupervised probation.

The three men, who were charged in two separate cases, all had the felony charges reduced to misdemeanors earlier this year. The Idaho Press reports Ada County Magistrate Judge Michael Oths also gave the men withheld judgments on Thursday, which means the convictions won't show up on their criminal records.

Denis Palamarchuk was arrested in January when he was stopped while transporting a shipment of industrial hemp from Oregon to Colorado on behalf of Big Sky Scientific. Andrew D'Addario and Erich Eisenhart were arrested in 2018 after Idaho State Troopers found that they were driving industrial hemp plants from Colorado to Oregon.

Though hemp products like lotion and food items are sold in stores throughout the state, the plants themselves are illegal because Idaho's anti-marijuana laws are very broadly written.

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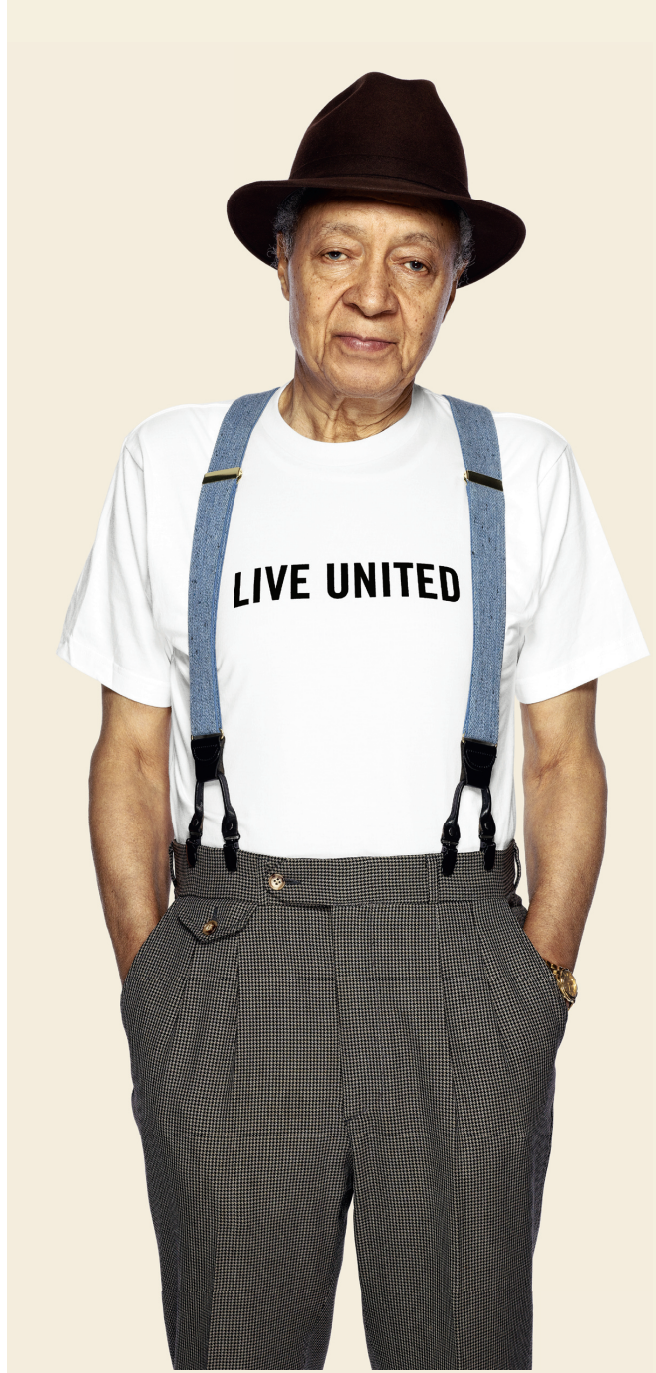
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Poker Night (FREE)
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Every Thursday
Dinner at 5:30 p.m.
Class starts at 6:15 p.m.

BAKER COUNTY AA MEETINGS BAKER CITY

MONDAYS
Survivor's Group
12 - 1:00 pm
Baker Presbyterian Church
1995 4th St.
(4th & Court, Side Door)

TUESDAYS
K.I.S.S.
(Keep it Simple Sister)
12 - 1:00 pm
1645 Eldon St. Eldon Court
Apts Community Room

WEDNESDAYS
Survivor's Group
12:05 pm
Baker Presbyterian Church
1995 4th St.
(4th & Court, Side Door)

THURSDAYS
Survivor's Group
12:05 pm
Baker Presbyterian Church
1995 4th St.
(4th & Court, Side Door)

FRIDAYS
Been There Done That
(Grapevine Meeting)
5:30 - 6:30 pm 2970 Walnut
(Corner of "D" & Grove St.)
Grove Apts. Community Rm

SATURDAYS
As Bill Sees It Group
10:00 am 2970 Walnut
(Corner of "D" & Grove St.)
Grove Apts. Community Rm

SUNDAYS
Been There Done That
5:30 pm 2970 Walnut
(Corner of "D" & Grove St.)
Grove Apts. Community Rm

Questions call AA Hotline:
541-624-5117
www.oregonaadistrict29.org

WEDNESDAYS
Enterprise Group
7:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

TUESDAYS
Enterprise Group
12 - 1:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

Enterprise Group
7 - 8:00 pm
(Big Bk Study)
113.5 E Main St.

WEDNESDAYS
Enterprise Group
7:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

THURSDAYS
Enterprise Group
12 - 1:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

All Saints (Mens Mtg)
7:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

FRIDAYS
Enterprise Group
7:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

SATURDAYS
Enterprise Group
7:00 pm
113.5 E Main St.

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Grace and Dignity (Womans Mtg)
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Joseph United Methodist Church
301 S. Lake St.
Corner 3rd & Lake Side Stairs on Lake St.

WEDNESDAYS
Grace and Dignity (Womans Mtg) 12 pm
301 S. Lake St., Church Basement

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