

# California utility charged in 2019 wildfire

By **DON THOMPSON**  
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A California prosecutor filed 33 criminal charges Tuesday, April 6, against troubled Pacific Gas & Electric for a 2019 wind-driven wildfire officials blamed on the utility, accusing it of injuring six firefighters and endangering public health with smoke and ash.

The company denied that it committed any crimes even as it accepted that its transmission line sparked the blaze.

The Sonoma County district attorney charged the utility with five felony and 28 misdemeanor counts in the October 2019 Kincade Fire north of San Francisco. The blaze burned more than 120 square miles and destroyed 374 buildings.

The 33 charges include recklessly causing a fire with great bodily injury to six firefighters, named only as John Does #1-#6. Among the firefighters injured were a member of an inmate fire crew and at least two out-of-state contractors, one of whom suffered second- and third-degree burns to his legs and torso.

Fire officials said a PG&E transmission line sparked the fire, which destroyed hundreds of homes and caused nearly 100,000 people to flee.

The utility said it hadn't seen the report or evidence gathered by state fire investigators, but it will accept the finding that its transmission line caused the fire "in the spirit of working to do what's right for the victims."

"However, we do not believe there was any crime here," the company said in a statement. "We remain committed to making it right for all those impacted



Noah Berger/Associated Press, File

In this Oct. 27, 2019, photo, flames from the Kincade Fire consume a winery in Healdsburg, California. A California prosecutor has charged troubled Pacific Gas & Electric with starting a 2019 wildfire. The Sonoma County District Attorney on Tuesday April 6, 2021, charged the utility in the October 2019 Kincade Fire north of San Francisco.

and working to further reduce wildfire risk on our system."

It thanked firefighters, including those who were injured, and said it was grateful that no one died.

The company serves more than 16 million people across much of Northern California. PG&E Corporation Chief Executive Officer Patti Poppe said in her own statement that she came to the company in January to "make it safe again in California. We will work around the clock until that is true for all people we are privileged to serve."

The charges and related enhancements accuse the company of destroying inhabited structures and emitting air contaminants "with reckless disregard for the risk of great bodily injury" from toxic wildfire smoke and related particulate matter and ash, thereby endangering public health.

They allege that the utility failed to maintain services and facilities including transmission lines, one of the numerous related misdemeanor charges.

It's the latest in a series of similar problems for the utility.

PG&E's alleged criminal negligence in the Sonoma County wildfire occurred while the company was still mired in a bankruptcy triggered by a series of deadly infernos that were ignited by the utility's crumbling equipment during 2017 and 2018.

The most lethal in Butte County wiped out the entire town of Paradise in the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California's recorded history. It culminated in PG&E pleading guilty to 84 felony counts of involuntary manslaughter last June.

Although PG&E's then-chief executive Bill Johnson appeared in court to enter the guilty pleas before some of the surviving families of those killed in Butte County, no one from company went to prison. Instead, the company paid the maximum penalty of \$4 million.

PG&E emerged from bankruptcy protection shortly after those guilty pleas after negotiating a series of settlements to

cover the damages caused by its fraying grid. Those settlements included a \$13.5 billion fund for wildfire victims that recently started distributing some of the money to help people rebuild their lives.

The Sonoma County wildfire also raised the hackles of a federal judge overseeing PG&E's ongoing criminal probation for a 2010 explosion in its natural gas lines that blew up a neighborhood in San Bruno, a suburb south of San Francisco.

U.S. District William Alsup, who has repeatedly lambasted PG&E for its shoddy maintenance of its equipment, is currently considering ordering proposed changes that could result in the utility being forced to turn off its power lines even more frequently than it has in recent years during dry and windy conditions to reduce the chances of causing more deadly fires.

## — LOCAL BUSINESS BRIEFS —

### Baker County residents join national beef group

BAKER CITY — Three Baker County residents are new members of the American Angus Association. Kimberlee Kerns of Baker City and Kyle and Alysha Dennis of Halfway have joined the national breed organization, which has its headquarters at St. Joseph, Missouri.

The American Angus Association, with more than 25,000 active adult and junior members, is the largest beef breed association in the world. Its computerized records include detailed information on over 19 million registered Angus.

### Antone Creek Lodge makes state's getaway list

UNION COUNTY — Travel Oregon, the state's tourism promotion department, included Antone Creek Lodge on its recent list of "Cottagecore Getaways in Oregon."

Antone Creek Lodge offers five small cabins for rent about nine miles from Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, making the site in the Elkhorn Mountains the closest accommodations to the resort.

The lodge is about 30 miles west of La Grande or about 30 miles east of Baker City. Antone Creek Lodge provides access to hiking, biking, fishing and other lake activities at Anthony Lake Campground from July through September.

### Production seeks young adult actors for summer film

NEW ORLEANS — A casting call for a road trip movie that will film in Central Oregon in the summer is seeking teens and young adults ages 18-25 of all backgrounds, ethnicities and walks of life.

Bill and Turner Ross are directing the untitled movie, which will follow four teen friends as they set off on an adventure across the Pacific Northwest to chase down their own version of the American dream. The production encourages individuals, groups of friends, siblings and couples to audition, and acting experience is not necessary.

The Ross brothers filmmaking style is a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction, and the production company is seeking people who connect with the story to play themselves, including daredevils, fearless outcasts, misfits and strong personalities.

Auditions will be April and May, and the project will film for eight weeks over June and July. The production will pay for all roles and cover all travel costs.

To apply for an audition, submit your name, age, hometown and a photo or selfie to [www.cargobuhl.com/](http://www.cargobuhl.com/) submit, or text to Jesy at 504-233-0016.

For more information, call Jesy or email [cargobuhl-casting@gmail.com](mailto:cargobuhl-casting@gmail.com).

— EO Media Group

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- Little Bagel Shop
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- Haines Sell-Rite
- Idle Hour
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[neo-na.org](http://neo-na.org)

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**AL-ANON** Attitude of Gratitude. Wednesdays, 12:15-1:30pm. Faith Lutheran Church. 12th & Gekeler, La Grande. 541-786-2051

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Harvest Church  
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**114 Self-Help Group Meetings**

**PEOPLE with PARKINSON'S**  
Caregivers, Family, Friends  
**SUPPORT GROUP**  
Contact Judith at 208-855-9199  
Meetings resume @GRH when restrictions ease.

**114 Self-Help Group Meetings**

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Joseph, OR  
6-7pm. Contact 541-398-1398

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