

San Francisco gas explosion shoots fire that burns buildings

Crews working on fiber optic cables cut through gas lines

By JANIE HAR
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A gas explosion in a San Francisco neighborhood shot flames into the air for hours Wednesday and burned five buildings, sending panicked residents and workers fleeing into the streets.

It took utility crews more than two hours to put out the fire after private construction workers cut a natural gas line, igniting the towering flames, Fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White said.

Authorities initially said five workers were missing, but the entire construction crew was found safe, and no other injuries were reported.

Officials evacuated several nearby buildings, including a medical clinic and apartment buildings, Hayes-White said.

Vehicles on a busy street got rerouted as authorities cordoned off the bustling retail and residential neighborhood.

The fire damaged a building housing Hong Kong Lounge II, a popular dim sum restaurant frequented by tourists and students at the University of San Francisco that made many “best of” lists.

Caroline Gasparini, 24, who



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

San Francisco firefighters battle a fire on Geary Boulevard in San Francisco on Wednesday.

lives catty-corner from where the fire ignited, said she and her housemate were in their living room when the windows started rattling. She looked up to see flames reflected in the glass.

“We went into crisis mode,” Gasparini said. “We grabbed our shoes, grabbed our laptops and grabbed our passports and just left.”

Gasparini said they saw employees of the burning restaur-

ant run out the back door and people fleeing down the block.

Nick Jalali, 28, was cooking at home when the electricity cut out. “We didn’t hear anything,” he said. “We just felt the shaking, and the next thing we knew, people were banging on the door to tell people it’s time to start evacuating.”

Firefighters worked to keep the fire from spreading while Pacific Gas & Electric crews tried to shut

off the natural gas line.

PG&E spokeswoman Melissa Subbotin said state excavation rules required crews to dig by hand around other pipelines before they were eventually able to “squeeze” a 4-inch plastic line.

She said that because the fire was contained to a limited area, the utility had to weigh the threat from the fire with the risk of more drastic action.

“Had we turned the gas off to

a transmission system, we would have shut off gas to nearly the entire city of San Francisco,” she said.

“The objective of this was to turn the gas off safely and as quickly as possible.”

In an earthquake, Subbotin said PG&E would shut off a transmission line. The company stressed that the workers who cut the gas line are not affiliated with the nation’s largest utility.

The fire began around 1:20 p.m., apparently by crews working on fiber-optic wires, Hayes-White said.

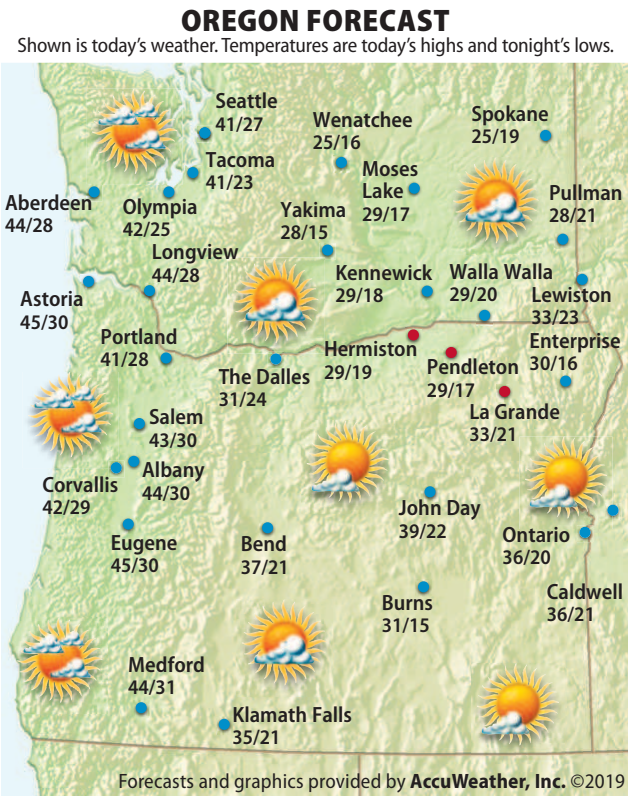
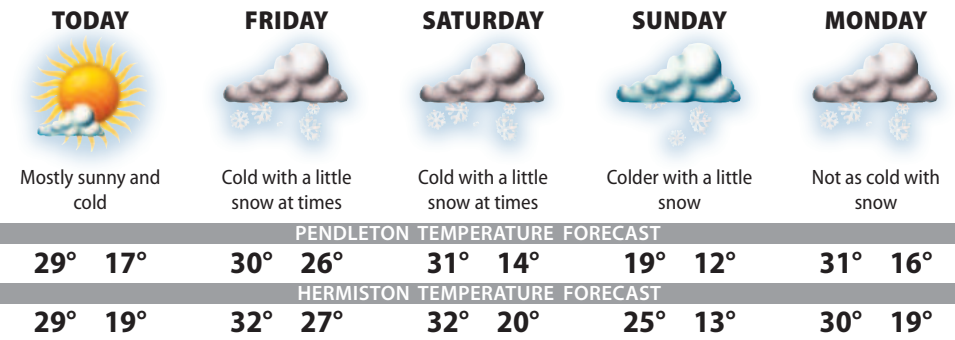
Joseph Feusi lives four blocks away and said he was awoken by what sounded like a jet engine. Feusi, who works nights and sleeps in the afternoon, said he could see the towering flames from his home.

“I think the eight guys are really lucky they didn’t get blown to bits,” he said.

PG&E is under heightened scrutiny over its natural gas pipelines after one exploded under a neighborhood south of San Francisco in 2010, killing eight people and wiping out a neighborhood in suburban San Bruno.

A U.S. judge fined PG&E \$3 million for a conviction on six felony charges of failing to properly maintain the pipeline, and the utility remains under a federal judge’s watch in that case.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	23°	4°
Normals	44°	28°
Records	67° (1996)	-6° (1899)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"
Month to date	0.79"
Normal month to date	0.28"
Year to date	2.86"
Last year to date	1.85"
Normal year to date	1.66"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	27°	2°
Normals	45°	29°
Records	65° (1965)	-13° (1929)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace
Month to date	0.68"
Normal month to date	0.20"
Year to date	2.21"
Last year to date	1.24"
Normal year to date	1.48"

WINDS (in mph)

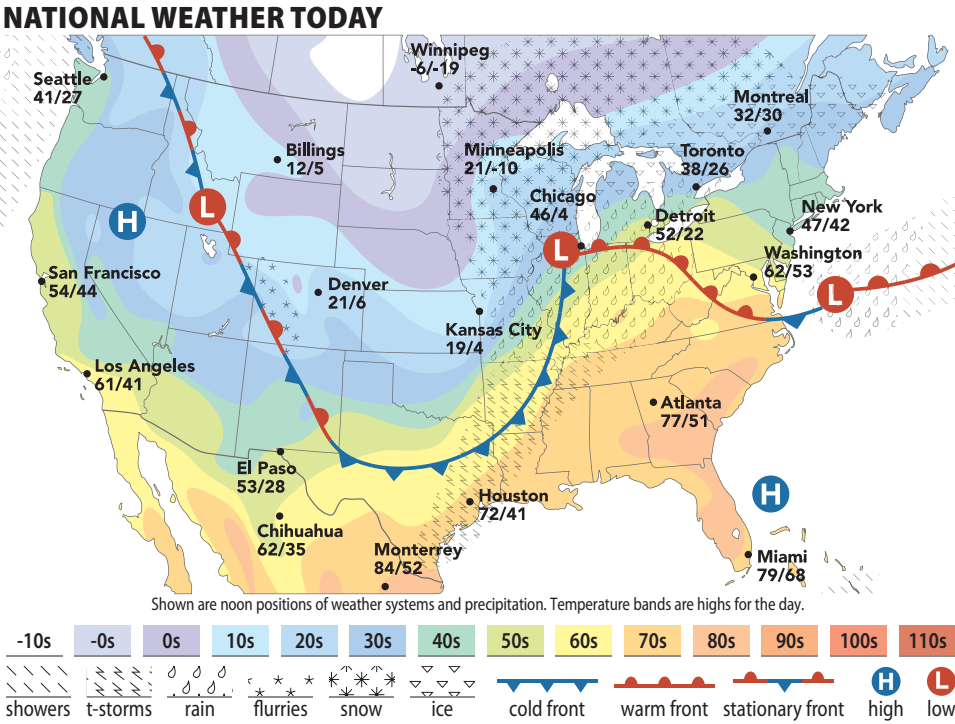
	Today	Fri.
Boardman	NE 4-8	S 4-8
Pendleton	NNE 4-8	SW 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	7:10 a.m.
Sunset tonight	5:10 p.m.
Moonrise today	8:46 a.m.
Moonset today	8:05 p.m.

	First	Full	Last	New
	Feb 12	Feb 19	Feb 26	Mar 6

NATIONAL EXTREMES
Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 89° in McAllen, Texas Low -23° in Kabetogama, Minn.



Authorities: Photographer drugged, raped young models

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

MCMINNVILLE — A professional photographer drugged and sexually assaulted young models or aspiring models he worked with in Oregon and California, federal and state authorities said Wednesday.

Robert Arnold Koester, 52, is accused of bringing young women and girls to a remote property outside McMinnville, in Oregon’s wine country, taking nude photos of them and sexually assaulting them there, Yamhill County District Attorney Brad Berry said at a news conference.

He announced an indictment charging Koester with 32 counts, including rape.

Investigators serving two search warrants at the remote, 28-acre property seized “many, many terabytes” of digital photos and videos as evidence. The images suggest other victims may have been abused on the property, Berry said.

Authorities asked anyone who was at the property for a modeling shoot — or anyone who knows of female models who went to Koester’s property — to

contact authorities.

Koester’s defense attorney in the California cases, Jonathan Lynn, declined to comment when reached by phone Wednesday.

The indictment in the Oregon cases is sealed and court records, including a listing for a defense attorney, were not available in the state’s online criminal system. No one immediately returned an email sent to a listing on Koester’s business website.

Koester, who was known professionally as Bert Kay, worked primarily photographing models in the U.S. West but authorities said they have identified potential victims in cities across the country. He got referrals for modeling shoots from several professional modeling agencies and was fairly well-known within the industry, Berry said.

His business website, Bert Kay Photography, is splashed with the slogan “Chasing Light: From a hilltop farm in Oregon wine country to locations worldwide,” and features some of his Pacific Northwest modeling photography.

The charges in Oregon and California identify

eight people — four in Oregon and four in California, Berry said.

“It’s hard to give you an estimate of the number of victims, in part because the amount of information that has been seized and has yet to be analyzed is huge and we don’t really know,” Berry said. “We wholly expect there to be more victims.”

Koester, who also went by Rhake Winter and Qitooly, was indicted in Oregon on Jan. 30, on 32 counts of first-degree rape, sodomy, unlawful sexual penetration and causing another person to ingest a controlled substance. The alleged victims include three women and one girl who were brought to the Oregon property from outside the state, Berry said.

Koester is also charged with 23 sex-related counts in San Diego County, where he was arrested in November 2018 on suspicion of sexually abusing four teenage girls in Carlsbad, California.

He is being held on \$1 million bail there and is on a hold in the federal cases, court records show. His bail in Oregon is \$2.5 million.

Koester also faces two federal counts of sexual exploitation of a minor in California. He bought the Oregon property in 2012 or 2013, Berry said.

Suspect in shooting arrested after car chase

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — Authorities say a lengthy car chase erupted into gunfire on interstates in Portland, and ended with the arrest of another suspect in the fatal shooting of a convenience store clerk.

Police in Kelso, Washington, said Erkinso K. Bossy, 23, was arrested shortly

before 8 p.m. Tuesday after a pursuit from Vancouver, Washington, into Portland.

The Columbian reports police pursuing the fleeing pickup exchanged gunfire with at least one suspect and an officer was being treated for minor injuries at an area hospital. Bossy was being treated at a hospital for seri-

ous injuries suffered in the incident. Police say he did not have gunshot wounds.

Investigators say Bossy was with D’Anthony Leslie Williams, 19, when he allegedly fatally shot 30-year-old Kayla Chapman, a clerk at a Kelso market, on Jan. 22. Williams was arrested the next day.

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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