

California utility admits it may have ignited blaze

By **ROBERT JABLON AND JOCELYN GECKER**
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California's biggest utility admitted its electrical equipment may have ignited a destructive wildfire spreading through the state's wine country Friday, despite blackouts imposed across the region to prevent blazes.

The disclosure came as firefighters battled flames in both Northern California and Southern California: the fire amid Sonoma County's vineyards, and a wind-whipped blaze that destroyed homes near Los Angeles.

The fire near the Northern California town of Geyserville burned at least 49 buildings and 34 square miles, and prompted evacuation orders for some 2,000 people.

It was driven by the strong winds that had prompted Pacific Gas & Electric to impose sweeping blackouts affecting a half-million people in Northern California and Central California. Power was restored to most people by Thursday evening, PG&E said.

PG&E resorted to shut-offs

after equipment malfunctions and trees blowing into power lines were blamed for sparking several blazes in recent years that killed scores of people, burned thousands of homes and ran up billions of dollars in claims that drove the utility into bankruptcy.

However, PG&E said Thursday it didn't turn off a 230,000-volt transmission line near Geyserville that malfunctioned minutes before the fire erupted. The utility reported finding a "broken jumper" wire on a transmission tower on Wednesday night.

PG&E CEO Bill Johnson said it was too soon to know if the faulty equipment sparked the fire. He said the tower had been inspected four times in the past two years and appeared to have been in excellent condition.

Investors were leery, though, and PG&E stock fell more than 20% during the day.

In shutting off the electricity, PG&E cut power to the distribution lines that supply homes, but not to its long-distance transmission lines.

Meanwhile, an estimated



AP Photo/David Crane

Firefighters put out hot spots on a house burned in the Tick Fire in Canyon County, Calif., early Friday.

50,000 people were under evacuation orders in the Santa Clarita area north of Los Angeles as hot, dry Santa Ana winds howling at up to 50 mph drove the flames into neighborhoods.

The cause of the fire was unknown, but Southern California Edison said it had cut off power to the area five hours before it broke out Thursday afternoon.

At least six homes were burned, and officials said the number was expected to rise as they took a more thorough look.

"I'm literally seeing sticks and fire of what used to be our home," Alejandro Corrales said.

She said the fire also took her mother's ashes, other belongings and possibly a pen full of pet sheep. "Everything in the house is

gone," Corrales said.

Firefighters on the ground and in the air struggled to protect homes surrounded by trees and brush as the fire grew to 4,300 acres.

Some residents tried to fight the blaze with garden hoses. People rushed to rescue dozens of horses, donkeys, goats, a pig and an emu.

High winds were expected to taper off by late afternoon. Southern California Edison, which shut off electricity to more than 31,000 customers on Thursday, said it was considering additional power cuts to more than 386,000.

The Los Angeles school district closed all its schools in the San Fernando Valley, citing poor air quality and other safety concerns.

While the high winds in Northern California had died down by Friday, they were expected to pick up over the weekend with gusts of 40 to 60 mph in many places, and PG&E warned it may black out an even larger region.

PG&E chief meteorologist Scott Strenfel said Northern California could be in for the strongest offshore winds in years.

Most states not giving driver's license data to Washington

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — An effort by the U.S. Census Bureau to collect state driver's license records as part of President Donald Trump's order to gather citizenship information has been a bust so far.

As of Wednesday, the vast majority of state motor vehicle agencies had not agreed to share their records with the bureau, according to an Associated Press survey of the 50 states. The effort over the past couple of months has alarmed civil rights groups, which see it as part of a backdoor move by the Trump administration to reduce the political power of minorities.

In August, the bureau began requesting five years worth of driver's license records, promising the information would be kept confidential. The effort began after the U.S. Supreme Court

rejected the Trump administration's plan to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census, and the president instead ordered citizenship data compiled through federal and state administrative records.

At least 13 states have refused to share the driver's license data, 17 are still deciding what to do, and 17 haven't yet received a request, according to the AP survey. Three states didn't respond to multiple AP queries.

Republican and Democratic states alike have said no, citing privacy concerns and prohibitions in state law.

"Philosophically, we believe the information in the database doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the people who it pertains to," Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap said. "It's not ours to give away."

Two of the biggest states, California and New York, haven't

received requests yet. Three more of the top five most populous states — Texas, Florida and Pennsylvania — are deciding how to respond.

Census Bureau officials had no immediate comment.

Many states got calls or emails similar to one from a Census Bureau official asking an Arkansas Driver Services official if she had time to discuss the bureau's "new and exciting project."

Scott Hardin, a spokesman for the Arkansas agency, said: "We are currently working to determine whether the requested information is eligible for release."

Utah officials turned down the request because state law says personal data can be shared only for public safety reasons, said Marissa Cote, a spokeswoman for the Department of Public Safety in the Republican-leaning state.

Democratic-leaning Nevada also declined.

HOW STATES RESPONDED

An effort by the U.S. Census Bureau to collect state driver's license records as part of President Donald Trump's order to gather citizenship information has been a bust so far. Survey results as of Wednesday:

Alabama, No	received	received
Alaska, No	Michigan, Not received	Oregon, No
Arizona, Not received	Minnesota, Not received	Pennsylvania, Undecided
Arkansas, Undecided	Mississippi, Didn't answer AP query	Rhode Island, Not received
California, Not received	Missouri, Undecided	South Carolina, Not received
Colorado, Undecided	Montana, Not received	South Dakota, Undecided
Connecticut, No	Nebraska, Undecided	Tennessee, Undecided
Delaware, Undecided	Nevada, No	Texas, Undecided
Florida, Undecided	New Hampshire, Didn't answer AP query	Utah, No
Georgia, Undecided	New Jersey, No	Vermont, Not received
Hawaii, Not received	New Mexico, No	Virginia, Not received
Idaho, No	New York, Not received	Washington, Not received
Illinois, No	North Carolina, Undecided	West Virginia, Didn't answer AP query
Indiana, No	North Dakota, Not received	Wisconsin, Not received
Iowa, Undecided	Ohio, Not received	Wyoming, Undecided
Kansas, Undecided	Oklahoma, Not	
Kentucky, Undecided		
Louisiana, No		
Maine, No		
Maryland, Undecided		
Massachusetts, Not		

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