

Dispatch calls link PG&E power lines to North Bay wild fires, cause still under investigation

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Firefighters in Napa and Sonoma Counties called in more than a dozen reports of downed power lines, live wires, and blown transformers in just the first three hours after devastating wildfires erupted in the North Bay, according to dispatch audio reviewed by 2 Investigates.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. responded to questions about its power system in a statement Wednesday, saying 75 mph winds and dry vegetation contributed to some trees and debris “impacting” electric lines. The cause of the fires, which had claimed 31 lives as of Thursday night is still under investigation.

“That’s PG&E issuing something that is soft peddling the issue,” said attorney Frank Pitre. Pitre is a strong critic of the gas and electric company due to its involvement in the San Bruno explosion and the deadly 2015 Butte Fire. PG&E was fined \$8 million after investigators found one of its line hitting a tree caused the flames.

In regards to the North Bay Fires, Pitre told 2 Investigates transparency and cooperation by PG&E is paramount even if a cause is still being investigated.

“[They] admit their lines are involved and equipment was involved, but try to redirect people to believing this was because of high winds that were unforeseen,” he said. “I don’t buy that at this stage.”

According to dispatch audio between fire crews in the first few hours of the firefight, multiple spot fires erupted near the sites of down power lines and fallen trees.

Attorneys

Frank M. Pitre

Practice Areas

Commercial Litigation

Personal Injury & Wrongful Death

DISPATCH CALLS LINK PG&E POWER LINES TO NORTH BAY WILD FIRES, CAUSE STILL UNDER INVESTIGATION

In one exchange between firefighters in Napa County, crews on the ground called in downed wires and a blown transformer near Linda Vista and Lone Oaks Avenue around 9:15 p.m. Sunday. And about 15 minutes later, crews can be heard reporting a fire in the same area. It's unclear whether that particular fire was quickly knocked down or possibly grew into a larger blaze.

On Thursday, PG&E sent 2 Investigates a statement saying "We are supporting first responders, including CalFire and other agencies, in their response to the multiple fires across Northern California. There will likely be reviews of these wildfires by appropriate agencies, but right now we are focused on life safety and service restoration. We aren't going to speculate about any of the causes of the fires; we will support the reviews by any relevant regulator or agency. Our customers are our neighbors and friends and we will stand beside them and work together throughout this restoration process."

In the hours and days following the outbreak of the firestorm, 2 Investigates' cameras captured images of downed power lines, exploded transformers, and burned power polls in multiple locations in Napa and Sonoma counties. On Monday, a police officer warned pedestrians to clear out of a street in Santa Rosa where live wires were laying on the ground near a shopping center off Cleveland Ave.

As 2 Investigates crews drove through burned neighborhoods in Napa and Sonoma counties, they counted several downed power polls, wires hanging dangerously low, and PG&E crews working on tangled or toppled lines in multiple areas.

PG&E is required by law to keep vegetation more than 10 feet away from its power polls and towers, and to remove flammable debris from around the surrounding ground... *(To read the entire article, please click [HERE](#))*