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PG&E to Double Up Vegetation Management

By Nick Marnell



Not a symbiotic relationship. Photo N. Marnell

subject trees are on East Bay Municipal Utility District, PG&E and East Bay Regional Park District properties," said Orinda city manager Janet Keeter.

The Lafayette work area related to transmission power lines is between the Highway 24/680 crossing west to Pleasant Hill Road, and along Olympic Boulevard to St. Mary's Road. "You'll see Davey Tree around Lamorinda every summer trimming branches," said Steven Falk, city manager. "Lafayette, at least, views this as part of the utility's routine maintenance and does not consider it to be controversial."

"Although we don't yet have a specific date, the tree work is expected to begin soon and PG&E is in the process of communicating details of the upcoming work to private property owners and city officials," said company spokeswoman Tamar Sarkissian. She said that the work will not begin until all PG&E customers are notified. In addition to work on the transmission lines, residents can expect to see routine vegetation compliance work performed along PG&E's distribution power lines throughout the area.

PG&E also plans to launch its Pipeline Pathways Project in Lamorinda, likely to begin this fall. The goal of this controversial program is to remove trees from within 10 feet of gas mains. The utility is currently working with Concord and Walnut Creek on a set of deal points that would control how the trees are selected for removal, according to Falk. "I predict that the Lamorinda cities won't hear from PG&E about the gas program until the utility has worked out its issues with those other two cities," he said.

More High Fire Risks

Lamorinda's fire marshals pointed out two additional areas in their districts that they think have potential for serious vegetation fires.

"The biggest problems have been on the lines between Rossmoor and Lafayette," said Robert Marshall of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. "Three of the past four years there has been a fire in that area." He explained that animals - mostly birds and squirrels - will sit on a charged wire, get electrocuted and fall to the ground. The heat from the fried animal can start a fire in the three foot high grass.

"The short answer is north Orinda, wherever the high power lines come in," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Kathy Leonard. "And the thick vegetation around and below the power lines in Lost Valley is a big concern," she added.

Marshall cautioned Lamorinda weekend vegetation managers. "While PG&E does trim around the utility poles, they don't trim from the pole to your house," he said. "If you have a lot of trees, call PG&E. Don't try to trim the trees yourself. Even though those wires are insulated, they are still dangerous."

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