



Published September 5th, 2018

MOFD chief offers strategies to cope with PG&E power shutdowns

By Nick Marnell

To allay concerns about power shutdowns that the Pacific Gas and Electric Company plans to institute during high fire-threat weather conditions, Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker outlined steps residents can take to ensure that they always receive proper emergency notifications and evacuation alerts. According to the utility, "For public safety, it may be necessary for us to temporarily turn off electricity to customers who are served by PG&E electric lines that run through extreme fire-threat areas." But if PG&E shuts down power, how will residents be made aware of an approaching fire or to evacuate, especially in the era of internet-based phone systems and hands-free phones?

Winnacker recommended the purchase of an uninterruptible power source, which for about \$75 will provide adequate power for up to six hours. "And that gives you your Wi-Fi connection," he said. He also suggested the purchase a battery-powered AM/FM/weather alert radio to receive notifications during a power outage. The chief said he found one on Amazon for \$29.

The chief eschewed the use of sirens. "They are not designed to reach into buildings to communicate what is going on outside," Winnacker said. Rather, he favors relying on the Contra Costa County Community Warning System, which provides automated phone calls, text messages and weather alerts and allows for targeted evacuations of those who face the highest risk. For residents who sign up for Reverse 911, a feature of the warning system, "We can determine to the lot where the emergency is," Winnacker said. The chief also recommended signing up for Nixle alerts, emergency notifications provided by public agencies.

PG&E said it will make every effort to contact customers in advance of a power shutdown. Customers can sign up for the alerts on the utility website.

The chief offered perspective on the utility's power shutdown policy. "There is very little likelihood that this will happen," Winnacker said. Even in this record-setting fire season, PG&E has not yet reached the threshold for a preemptive power shutdown anywhere in California.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA