

# PG&E seeks agreements for the new safety program

- Tom Infusino
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If you have some particular trees on your property that give it character, or if you have attractive bushes or other desirable landscape plantings that you are fond of, it may be worthwhile for you to get informed about a new Pacific Gas and Electric Co. program that aims to strip vegetation on private property near power distribution lines.

While on a PG&E field trip in May, we at the Calaveras Planning Coalition learned that, for the next three years, PG&E contractors will be going door-to-door seeking for landowner agreements for contractors to remove additional vegetation from around power distribution lines in residential neighborhoods in Calaveras and Tuolumne counties to improve the fire safety of communities in extreme fire-threat areas. If you have a power distribution pole with a crossbar and/or two separate electrical wires crossing your property, then this program may affect you. Because this new program involves much more vegetation removal than people are accustomed to, we wanted to make sure people understood what is going on. In the past, PG&E removed dead and hazardous trees, and cut 4-foot diameter holes in live tree canopies around power lines.

Under the new program, within the PG&E easement (often 8 feet on either side of the pole, all the way along the easement), PG&E will remove all unsuitable vegetation, all vegetation over about a foot in height and all branches crossing into the easement – at no cost to the property owner. If removal of the branches diminishes the tree's canopy enough to threaten the tree's survival, PG&E will request permission to remove that tree as well, to avoid having a dead hazard tree in the near future. If a landowner feels that this effort will be sufficient for fire safety, then he or she can say no to any additional clearing.

If allowed by the property owner, PG&E would like to apply the same treatment out to 15 feet on either side of the poles. However, a willing landowner may also request a less-severe treatment. PG&E and its contractors will work with individual property owners one-on-one to develop a plan for their property that increases safety while also seeking to preserve the beauty of the area.

We encourage property owners to take photographs of the areas marked for vegetation removal, and the trees marked for retention, providing some evidence of what was agreed to, just in case it is needed later.

You can try to negotiate other conditions on PG&E's right to treat areas beyond the easement, which you will also want to include in a written agreement. For example, if you want to sell the merchantable timber on your own, or retain some material for firewood, you can ask to do so. Explain how you want the treated property to look when PG&E is finished: e.g. stumps removed,

debris removed, land raked flat, incidental road damage repaired, downed address numbers rehung on another tree, etc. If you feel that you will have out-of-pocket expenses that should be compensated, like putting up awnings on windows no longer shaded by trees or replanting the cleared area with approved vegetation, then you can try to negotiate some compensation from PG&E. You can request notice of when the work will be done, when roads will be closed and if you need to vacate the premises for safe tree removal. If you are not satisfied with the conditions PG&E and its contractors are willing to live by, then you can always agree to no further treatment beyond the PG&E easement.

If you have questions about this program, contact Tom Smith at PG&E at 726-6393 or [tcs3@pge.com](mailto:tcs3@pge.com).

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