



California: Up To 3-Million People To Lose Power As PG&E Begins “Unprecedented” Blackouts

Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), California's largest utility, began shutting off power Wednesday to an unprecedented 3-million people in Northern California in the face of hot, windy weather that raises the risk of wildfires sparking blazes on power lines. More than half-million households have already been affected by the power shut down that could last up to a week. PG&E is hoping to prevent a repeat of a catastrophe last November in which faulty power lines it owned were determined to have ignited California's deadliest wildfire that killed 86 people. Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric warned that they may also shut down power to urban areas. -GEG

As previewed last night, PG&E Corp., California's largest (bankrupt) utility, began shutting off power Wednesday to an unprecedented 3 million people in Northern California in the face of hot, windy weather that raises the risk of wildfires. While the high winds are forecast to subside by late Thursday, the company will undertake extensive inspections of its equipment before turning electricity back on, meaning outages could persist into next week. More than 3 million people may be eventually affected, based on city estimates and the

average household size. The economic impact may reach \$2.6 billion.

Half a million homes and businesses in Northern California have already lost power as PG&E orchestrates the biggest-ever intentional power shutoff to keep its lines from sparking blazes. The company was scheduled to shut service to another 234,000 customers in cities including Berkeley and Oakland at noon local time, but told city and county officials that those cutoffs will instead start Wednesday evening. Strong, dry winds that heighten the risk of wildfires are picking up later than forecast, the company said

According to [Bloomberg](#), never before have California utilities intentionally cut power to so many people for their own safety – and never has a shutoff affected such major metropolitan areas, even as the city of San Francisco and Silicon Valley appear spared. The undertaking is key to fairly new strategy by PG&E for preventing power lines from sparking another deadly – and costly – conflagration.

“This is unprecedented in terms of what all of us are facing as a community,” PG&E Vice President Sumeet Singh said at a media briefing Tuesday night. “We are doing everything we can to minimize the impact on our customers’ lives.”

The shutoff was scheduled to occur in three phases, eventually affecting almost 800,000 homes and businesses, including in the San Francisco Bay Area and Napa County. The next phase will include parts of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, among others. The utility will also turn off 21,800 customers in Mendocino and Calaveras counties who didn’t lose power during the first stage.

After that, PG&E will weigh a third one for the southernmost portions of its service area, affecting 42,000. In all, about 15% of the utility’s customers may go dark.

The bankrupt Pacific Gas & Electric, which announced the deliberate outage, is working to prevent a repeat of a catastrophe last November in which faulty power lines it owned were determined to have sparked California's deadliest wildfire in modern history. California Gov. Gavin Newsom said the "frustration that Californians feel as they deal with the impacts of these power outages is warranted," but that safety was the main concern.

"The biggest threat looks to be today and continuing into the day tomorrow," Marc Chenard, a senior branch forecaster with the U.S. Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland, said of the fire risk.

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