



CITY OF FORT BRAGG

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COUNCIL COMMITTEE ITEM SUMMARY REPORT

MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 20, 2019
TO: PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
FROM: TABATHA MILLER
AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Receive Report on October 26 and 29, 2019 PG&E Public Safety Power Shutdown (PSPS) and City Response and Recommended Improvements to Preparedness

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW:

As the direct result of the Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) Public Safety Power Shutdown (PSPS), Mendocino County spent five plus days without power. At least 37 other Northern California Counties suffered from partial or full power outages during the October 26 and 29 PSPS events, although not all customers endured loss of power continuously through both events. PSPS is a calculated decision by PG&E to turn off electricity to high-risk transmission lines as a fire precaution, during gusty and dry conditions when combined with a heightened fire risk.

Maps, warnings and press releases with information regarding the expected October 26 were released more than 48 hours in advance of the expected event. During the early information provided by PG&E, only a small southern portion of Mendocino County was included in the anticipated event and Fort Bragg was not included. In prior events, inconsistent information had been provided by PG&E as to the impact to Fort Bragg. Fort Bragg was not impacted by the PSPS events prior to October 26, 2019, although other parts of Mendocino County were included.

I received notice at 5:30pm on October 25 (Friday), that most, if not all of Mendocino County would be included in the October 26 event, and that this most likely incorporated Fort Bragg. I participated, in listen only mode, to the 5:30pm planning/information call with PG&E. Going forward, the Police Chief and Public Works Director were able to listen to these same calls. The purported purpose of these calls scheduled daily at 7:30am, 12:30pm and 5:30pm during the event were to keep local government informed prior to public release of information. As the event progressed, frustration from local

governments with the lack of timely, accurate and consistent information, was in full evidence. "Updates that provided no updates" was the phrase used to describe these calls and the information provided.

On Friday evening, arrangements were made with PG&E to use the CV Starr Parking Lot as a Community Resource Center (CRC). PG&E announced the CRC location on Saturday night but it didn't open until Monday morning at approximately 9:30am. Another source of frustration with PG&E's communication was the inability to determine if Fort Bragg was considered North or South Mendocino County. The time of estimated shut off and the duration of the event were considerably different between these two geographical regions. When the power went off, we confirmed Fort Bragg was considered south. Lake County experienced something similar. They found out the County was categorized in the wrong "Time Period" when their power went out many hours ahead of schedule.

Local Caltrans staff had anticipated and were prepared for the loss of power to the traffic signals along Main Street (Highway 1). They placed temporary stop signs in a timely fashion. In general, traffic flowed reasonably well through the affected intersections.

Notice that Fort Bragg was in the impacted area of the October 26 event, expected to begin at 5:00 pm the next day, was posted on the City's Facebook page at approximately 8:30 pm. From that point on, the City posted multiple Facebook updates daily as information was received, and to the extent possible these postings were translated into Spanish. On Saturday, October 26, prior to the outage the Police Department (PD) issued a press release in both English and Spanish.

After the power shutdown at approximately 5:45pm on Saturday night, City staff confirmed that generators at City Hall, the Police Department, Water Treatment Plant and the Wastewater Treatment Plant were operational and supporting continued City services. Water and wastewater service continued for City utility customers throughout the event. The only interruption to water service was the result of power intermittently coming off and on October 30, which caused a pump to blow out a 10-inch water main on Sanderson in the late evening hours. Service was restored by City staff at approximately 2:30am on October 31.

Shortly after the power outage, the radio repeater on Bald Hill, failed and PD communications were impacted. The Mendocino Sheriff's Office offered assistance by allowing the FBPD to share their radio channel. Comcast, the City's internet service provider went down sometime overnight on the October 26 and remained out until power was fully restored. This shutdown all City email communications with the outside world. Email continued to work internally but only from devices directly connected to the City's internal network.

Communications to Councilmembers and other community members were limited to texting. Postings to the City's Facebook page after Saturday night were accomplished from personal internet connections and personal devices. Calls directly to KOZT (Coast) radio provided updated announcements to the community. Sharing posts and word of mouth were additional methods of spreading information.

To accommodate members of the public who needed to charge devices on Sunday, the Police Department opened the lobby of the Police Station and left it open 24-hours a day through the event. Additionally, City Hall lobby was opened on Sunday from noon to 3:30 to allow members of the public to use the restrooms, charge devices and fill water bottles. City Hall opened for regular business on Monday and continued to allow individuals to charge devices in the downstairs' conference room, the lobby and in the small Finance Department lobby. City Hall extended service hours by not closing for lunch (12:30 – 1:30) and staying open until 6:00 pm.

Through the PG&E web portal, using an MCN connection bridged over from Town Hall, staff downloaded the list of Medical Baseline Customers. PG&E continued to report in the three times a day planning/information calls that Medical Baseline Customers were being reached by phone, email or knocking on doors but there was no indication from those customers that the City reached out to on both Monday and Wednesday that they had been contacted about the event from PG&E. PG&E also reported that they had contracted with a third party – California Foundation for Independent Living to provide additional resources and services to Medical Baseline Customers but we are unaware of any services provided locally.

The same MCN internet bridge was used by the Finance Department to send the City's payroll to the Bank on Wednesday morning. This required the temporary use of a small generator at Town Hall and a rerouting of the wireless service from Town Hall to City Hall.

The Police Department spent much of its time throughout the event providing traffic control for the Chevron Fueling Station on Main Street and other fueling stations that had generators during periods of time that fuel was available. Staff from Public Works and City Hall were also deployed to assist with traffic control. There were reports of waiting in line for gas for up to two hours at the Chevron Station during peak periods. As many as two Public Works staff, five City Hall staff, Councilmember Norvell and the entirety of the PD were used for traffic control during these peak hours.

Conclusion

I am very proud of City staff and our response during the PSPS event. I understand that there are community members, both residents of Fort Bragg and residents of unincorporated Mendocino County, who believe that the City should and could have done more during the PG&E caused PSPS. I acknowledge that there is more we can do and of course, there is room for improvement and lessons learned. But, please remember City services continued uninterrupted throughout the entirety of the event and City staff throughout the organization stepped in and up to provide support and extended services when, City staff like the rest of the community had to manage the impacts of the outage for their own families and in their own homes.

Something that I was reminded of during the event, is that the City of Fort Bragg is the face of government here on the coast and our community looks primarily to us for answers and services. It's a role we need to live up to but will need the community's assistance.

We learned lessons during the PSPS event that will help prepare the coast for more significant emergencies than just a corporation's decision to turn our power off.

Identified Challenges

1. All communities impacted by the PSPS event were dependent on PG&E for information, which was limited, conflicting and sometimes just wrong. Solution: create additional lines of communication and provide as much information as possible before the event or emergency. Don't depend on PG&E's communications.
2. Need for backup internet service. Solution: purchase separate service from another provider and apply pressure to regulatory agencies to hold providers accountable.
3. Long-term backup power needed for the PD communication repeater on Bald Hill. Solution: purchase an adequately sized generator for that location. Purchase handheld radios and a satellite phone for additional communication options.
4. Need for additional generators in the community to provide shelter and assist in continuation of basic services throughout the City. Solution: through grants and other city funds purchase portable generators that can be used at various locations, including the CV Starr Center.
5. Outreach to vulnerable populations within City limits. Because the City does not provide medical, health or social services, our understanding of the needs and identity of these populations is limited. It was clear that we cannot rely on PG&E to contact or assist these populations. Solution: create a network of local nonprofits and service providers who can collectively identify the special needs of our community members, share information and resources and create a plan for outreach and assistance in the time of need or emergency.
6. Lack of preparation by the community. Solution: More education, communication and availability of resources to respond to emergencies both individually and organizationally throughout the community.
7. Isolation from other PG&E, County and State resources. Solution: Self-reliance and better preparation. The PSPS event was a reminder that we cannot depend on resources that may be available in other communities.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Mendocino County Letter to PG&E
2. California Public Utilities Commission Notice Possible Enforcement Actions on PSPS Events
3. California Public Utilities Commission Notice on Action to Hold Communication Companies Accountable
4. City After Event Notes

