



Menlo Park Fire Protection District

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Joint Menlo Fire and PG&E Public Service Announcement

Fact Sheet

From Fire Chief Schapelhouman

I am sensitive to those who have concerns about the recent public service announcements (PSA's) being aired and distributed by PG&E in conjunction with the Fire District.

Specific to the most recent collaboration, PG&E approached me about joining other Fire Agencies who's joint public safety messages I had already seen on television many, many times. After discussing the type of content and public safety message focus, I agreed to this joint effort which was then taped on November 20 and 21, 2017.

We had last worked directly with PG&E on a PSA Video eleven months before in December 2016, during our annual Holiday Fire and Public Safety Live Fire Media Demonstration. <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DhEOg-mLN7M>
This annual event has been held on PG&E property for the last twenty years working in conjunction with Exponent Failure Analysis.

The Fire District has used this property, owned by PG&E, for almost 30 years to create a world class disaster city. During that time, we have trained not only own personnel and PG&E field workers, but also tens of thousands of Firefighters and Emergency First Responders from the Bay Area, State, Nation and from around the World.

Throughout my 37 year career I have often interacted with PG&E field responders on numerous occasions. From the mundane to critical emergency events that included electrocutions, gas fires and the rebuilding of a major distribution power tower to the City of Palo Alto after it was struck by an airplane that resulted in three fatalities, two burned residential structures and five burned vehicles, I have found them to be highly competent and professional.

In many instances during my career, we have not been able to safely mitigate or address an emergency problem without PG&E first response. From gas line breaks to fires involving the meter shut-offs to electrocutions and downed and energized power lines, it is the Fire Service that stands by until PG&E first responders can mitigate, abate or intervene so we can then do our work safely.

During the San Bruno Gas Line Explosion, the Fire District provided emergency response and field support for the first 48 hours of this incident. I personally worked on-site to help organize and coordinate various activities that supported the Fire Incident Commander under dynamic and heart breaking conditions. I was the direct liaison with PG&E Gas and Electric personnel during the initial hours of this terrible event.

"Excellence In Service"

I worked non-stop for the first 24 hours of the incident and subsequently attended PUC hearings, community meetings, memorial services and ultimately was directly engaged with PG&E representatives to modify, improve, update, upgrade and align their practices to better work with firefighters to support first response decision making and initial actions during gas emergencies.

We recently deployed firefighting first response units to the fires in Northern California along with a Drone Team that assisted Sonoma County with aerial documentation of the damage this fire storm created. We also brought in a Fire Analyst who helped us to better understand fire behavior that had never been seen before and are working closely with Santa Rosa Fire Department on the loan of a temporary fire facility so they can get their Fire Station 5 back on line.

Specific to concerns regarding the use of funds and personnel for this PSA, the filming was done with on-duty units and personnel, not using off-duty personnel who would need to be paid on overtime. The crews were all in service and emergency response was not affected.

The coordinating Battalion Chief attended on his day off and I was interviewed during my lunch hour. No one was “forced” to be there and I’m sure most of our personnel would tell you they enjoy working with PG&E line staff and that we have a strong working relationship with them.

In regards to the utility being held accountable and their potential culpability in recent fire disasters if rumors of their guilt are substantiated, I don’t deal with their corporate leadership, but I’m sure that they will need to answer many difficult questions and perhaps serious legal challenges, if those rumors are true.

Regarding the PSA, I believe my comments were in line with the incredibly supportive and critically important field relationship with we have with the men and women who work for PG&E and with whom we regularly interact with in the field during emergencies under adverse circumstances. In all cases I have found PG&E field personnel to be highly competent, professional and essential to resolving emergency situations associated with gas and electrical emergencies.

As far as their corporate practices and liability related to the recent fires, those are areas of concern and something I am closely watching. We would ask that they immediately stop using our agency and relationship for promotion if these claims were substantiated.

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