CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
Safety and Enforcement Division
Wildfire Safety and Enforcement Branch

Incident Investigation Report

Report Date: July 10, 2025

Incident Number: E20240707-01 (Pay Fire)

Regulated Utility Involved: Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E)

Date and Time of the Incident: July 6, 2024 at 1408 hours

Location of Incident: [redacted] and Denim Court in Placerville, El Dorado County

Fatality/Injury: None/None

Property Damage: Exceeding $50,000

Regulated Utility Facilities Involved: Placerville 1112 12kV distribution

Summary

On July 6, 2024, at 1408 hours, the Pay Fire ignited at [redacted] and Denim Court, Placerville in El Dorado County, in a Tier 2 High Fire Threat District. The Pay Fire burned 77 acres and damaged multiple vehicles, a deck, and hangers at Placerville Airport. The Pay Fire did not cause any injuries or fatalities. CAL FIRE determined that the probable cause of the fire was electrical arcing from the duplex service wire located at [redacted] The CAL FIRE report states that a large Grey Pine tree (Subject Tree) branch fell on the service wire and the branches from the tree limb sheared off the insulation on the secondary drop conductor attached to Incident Pole 121678580. The exposed conductor contacted the bare messenger cable,[1] creating an arc which ignited the dry grass below the wire.

SED conducted a site visit, reviewed PG&E inspections and maintenance records, and found no GO 95 or GO 165 violations.

Witnesses

	Name	Title
1.	Mihail Cucu	CPUC Lead Investigator
2.	Jasdeep Lally	CPUC Investigator
3.	[redacted]	PG&E Electric Incident Investigator

[1] A messenger cable is a bare steel wire wrapped around the outside of a conductor and provides mechanical support. The CAL FIRE report refers to this cable as the neutral wire.

4.	[redacted]	PG&E Law-Claims
5.	Erik Fiedler	CAL FIRE Battalion Chief
6.	Jeff Michel	CAL FIRE Captain Fire Specialist

Evidence

	Source	Title
1.	PG&E	Initial Incident Report, 07/07/2024
2.	PG&E	20-Day Incident Report, 08/02/24
3.	CPUC	Data Request No. 1, 09/04/2024
4.	PG&E	Data Request No. 1 Response, Part A, 09/18/2024
5.	PG&E	Data Request No. 1, Response Part B, 10/18/2024
6.	PG&E	Data Request No. 1, Response Part C, 10/25/2024
7.	CPUC	Data Request No. 2, 12/13/2024
8.	PG&E	Data Request No. 2, Part A, 01/03/2025
9.	PG&E	Data Request No. 2, Part B, 01/17/2025
10.	CAL FIRE	8.5x11_Pay_Fire_Parcel_Map
11.	CAL FIRE	AEU_DINS_2024_Pay_Incident
12.	CAL FIRE	Axon_Body_4_Video_2024-07-06_2015_D01A29552
13.	CAL FIRE	Axon_Report-Pay_Incident
14.	CAL FIRE	B&B_PayFire_report
15.	CAL FIRE	CALFIRS_Report_-_PAY_Incident
16.	CAL FIRE	FC34_Detail-All_Seg-SSM_(Incident_Number)_View_(21)
17.	CAL FIRE	Pay_Fire_Parcel_APN
18.	CAL FIRE	Pay_Fire_Tree_Memo,_Complete
19.	CAL FIRE	Pay_Incident_Origin_Area_Map_Side_View
20.	CAL FIRE	Pay_Incident_Origin_Area_Map_Top_View

Background

The Pay Fire occurred on July 6, 2024 at 1408 hours, at [redacted] and Denim Court in Placerville, El Dorado, CA (Incident Location). The Pay Fire ignited behind a fence in the back yard of a home next to the Incident Pole serving the Placerville 1112 12kV two-phase primary overhead distribution circuit. The Incident Location was in a Tier 2 High Fire Threat District (HFTD).

The Incident Location is served by a primary pole (Pole 121678579) with a transformer that is located to the west of the property. A service conductor runs from the primary pole to the Incident Pole and then to the home at the Incident Location. Figure 1 shows a satellite view of the incident area. Figure 2 shows the damaged Incident Pole 121678579, the fracture point of the Subject Tree, and the fractured tree limb.

Figure 1: Incident Location of the Pay Fire.

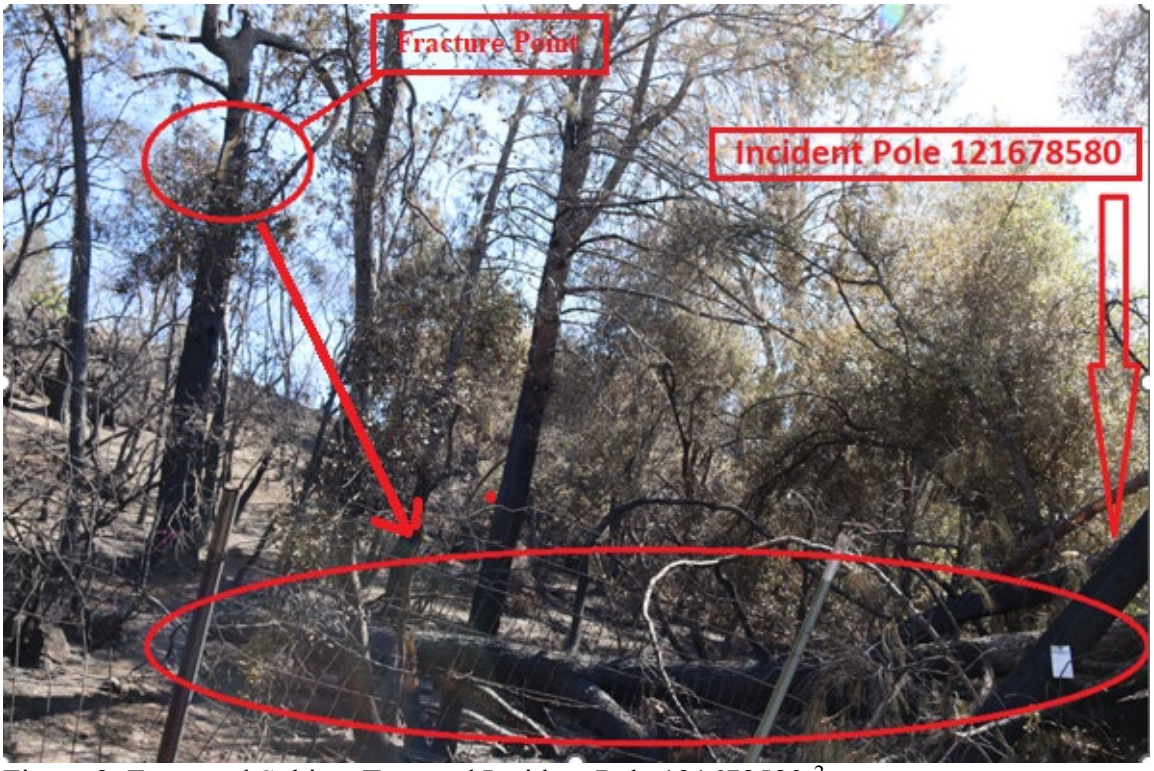

Figure 2: Fractured Subject Tree and Incident Pole 121678580.[2]

[2] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.

CAL FIRE reported that the Pay Fire burned 77.5 acres of brush hillside.[3] PG&E reported property damage due to the flames, including damage to multiple vehicles, a deck, and hangers at Placerville Airport. PG&E retained six customer meters, the burned/damaged Incident Pole, a portion of service conductor not collected by CAL FIRE, and two other PG&E poles northeast of the Incident Location. On July 7, 2024, at approximately 1430 hours, CAL FIRE informed PG&E that it had collected a secondary conductor in connection with the Pay Fire from the Placerville 1112 Circuit that served a single-family residence.

PG&E reported that the weather conditions observed at the Placerville Airport near the Incident Location on the day of the incident were 102 degrees F, a relative humidity of 15%, a wind speed of 8 mph, and wind gusts up to 13 mph.[4]

Fire Authority Report

SED obtained the CAL FIRE report on April 23, 2025. CAL FIRE determined that the probable cause of the fire was electrical arcing from the duplex service wire located at [redacted] due to a large Grey Pine branch that fell on the wire. The two energized wires of the secondary service line had insulation that was compromised in multiple areas, possibly caused by the abrasion from a Subject Tree limb exposing the bare conductor, which contacted a bare neutral conductor.[5]

CAL FIRE contracted with arborist Mcneil Arboriculture Consultant, LLC to assess and observe the Subject Tree. The arborist report concluded that the Subject Tree had a defect that caused the southern trunk to be prone to failure, due to a defect called "codominance." A codominance condition occurs when trunks of similar size on the same tree compete for dominance. As the tree grows larger, these trunk attachments are increasingly prone to mechanical failure. Because of this defect of the Subject Tree, the arborist report determined that a regular person would not have identified this condition and would not have been able to recognize the risk associated with the Subject Tree prior to the Pay Fire ignition on July 6, 2024.[6]

Figure 3, below, shows a close-up view of the fracture point of the Subject Tree, which was 26 feet high from the trunk base. The fracture point is where the portion of the trunk fractured and damaged the Incident Pole.

[3] CALFIRE Report_-_PAY Incident, July 21, 2024, p. 3.
[4] PG&E 20-Day Report, August 2, 2024, p. 3.
[5] CALFIRE Report_-_PAY Incident, July 21, 2024, p. 4.
[6] The arborist report is titled "Pay Fire Tree memo, August 4, 2024, p. 6."

Figure 3: Close up view of the fracture point on the Subject Tree.[7]

SED Review and Analysis

Review of Event Timeline

I. Incident Timeline

SED reviewed the timeline of events reported by PG&E:[8]

- On July 6, 2024, at 1430 hours, PG&E's Emergency Dispatch Center received a call from CAL FIRE requesting assistance for an active vegetation fire with structures involved and lines down at the Incident Location.
- At 1435 hours, PG&E dispatched multiple troubleshooters to assist with CAL FIRE's request, the first arriving at 1453 hours. At 1440 hours, PG&E remotely opened Line Recloser (LR) 74084 to deenergize the Incident Location and deenergized 170 customers. At 1455 hours, CAL FIRE requested that PG&E deenergize everything in a one-mile radius of the Incident Location. At 1500 hours, through remote switching, PG&E deenergized an additional 1,765 customers to make the area safe for fire suppression activities.
- At 1610 hours, a PG&E troubleshooter relayed to the PG&E Distribution Control Center ("DCC") that a tree branch "took down" a service drop at the Incident Location. CAL

[7] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.
[8] PG&E 20-Day Report, August 2, 2024, p. 2.

FIRE investigators were on the scene and did not allow PG&E access to the Incident Location immediately after the incident.

- At 2020 hours, CAL FIRE allowed a PG&E troubleshooter access to the primary pole near the Incident Location to open the fuses on the transformer. CAL FIRE collected two portions of the service conductor at the Incident Location.
- At 2040 hours, all customers were reenergized, except for 190 customers who were still in the active fire zone.

PG&E worked in coordination with CAL FIRE to energize and de-energize customers as the fire moved and suppression activities continued. At 1505 hours on July 8, 2024, all but one customer (the customer at the Incident Location) was energized. On July 9, 2024, at 1430 hours, the final customer was energized after repairs were completed at the Incident Location. At the Incident Location, PG&E replaced the secondary pole leading to the customer's weatherhead, as well as 200 feet of 1/0 triplex conductor. In addition, PG&E replaced two other PG&E poles northeast of the Incident Location that were damaged by the fire.

On July 8, 2024, PG&E's Vegetation Management (VM) teams conducted a post-fire investigation and found that the Subject Tree was a Grey Pine, which suffered a partial failure and struck the service drop at the Incident Location. The Subject Tree was 121 feet from the Incident Pole and had not previously been identified for any tree-trimming work.

PG&E reported this incident to the CPUC on July 7, 2024, under the property damage criterion due to property damage expected to exceed $50,000.

SED Field Observations

II. Site Visit at Incident Location

SED conducted a single site visit to the Incident Location on July 9, 2024.

On July 9, 2024, at 1000 hours, SED investigators met with a PG&E Electric Incident Investigator and PG&E Law-Claims Representative at [redacted] in Placerville. PG&E staff showed SED investigators the Incident Location and the ignition point at Incident Pole 121678580, which was located next to a fence behind the home at [redacted]. SED investigators noticed and took several photos of a fractured tree limb that broke off from Subject Tree and damaged Incident Pole 121678580, as shown in Figure 4. Figure 5 shows the stump of the Incident Pole.

After the Incident Location site visit, SED investigators met with CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Erik Fiedler and Fire Captain Specialist Jeff Michel at Mt. Danaher Fire Station. CAL FIRE staff unwrapped several pieces of evidence collected at the Incident Location attached to Incident Pole 121678580. As shown in Figure 6, SED investigators photographed extensive arc damage on the messenger cable and secondary service drop conductor attached to Incident Pole 121678580. In Figure 7, the insulation on the secondary service drop conductor appears to be stripped, exposing the bare metal conductor. SED investigators noticed that the arc damage visibly present on both the messenger cable and the service drop conductor appeared in the same location. Figure 8 shows a close-up view of the messenger cable with several areas of arc damage.

CAL FIRE staff stated that the fractured tree limb fell on the service conductor connected to the Incident Pole, which caused the pole to break. Additionally, CAL FIRE staff stated that branches from the Subject Tree limb sheared the insulation of the secondary line service drop conductor, causing the energized bare metal to contact the messenger cable. CAL FIRE stated that this contact between the stripped conductor and messenger cable resulted in arc damage and sparks.

Figure 4: Southern view of the fractured Subject Tree limb and Incident Pole 121678580.[9]

[9] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024

Figure 5: Stump of Incident Pole 121678580.[10]

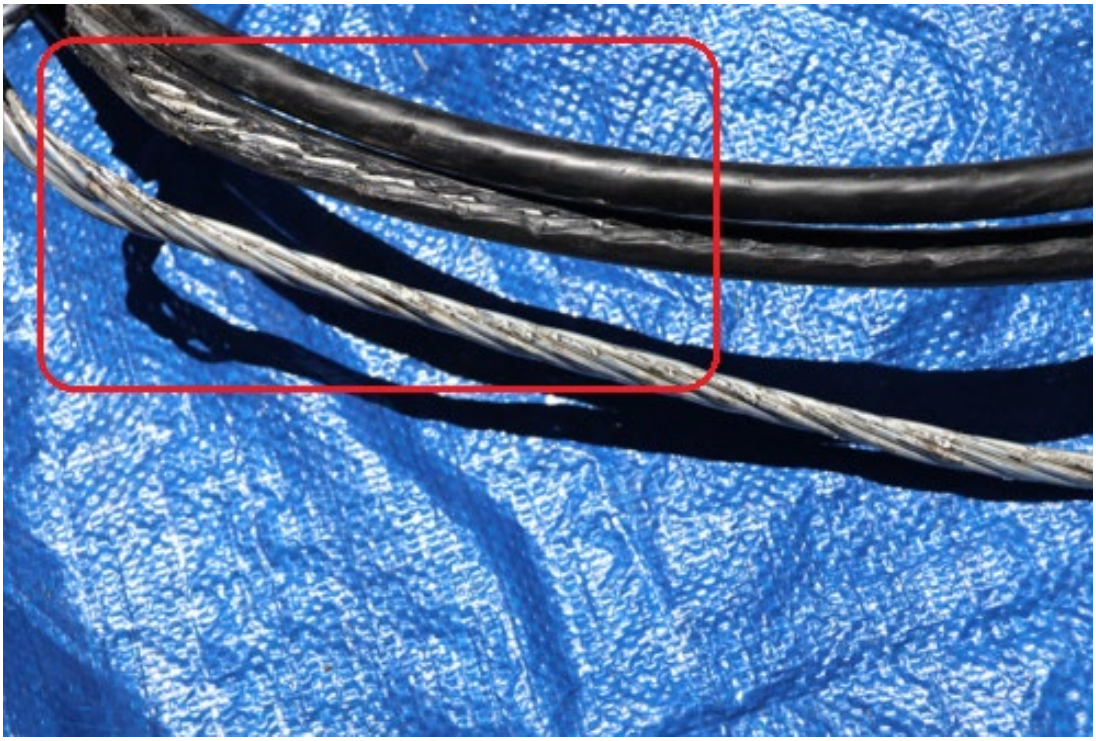

Figure 6: Secondary service drop conductor from Incident Pole 121678580 and messenger cable showing several arc damage areas on both cables.[11]

[10] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.
[11] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.

Figure 7: Secondary service drop conductor from Incident Pole 121678580 with insulation stripped.[12]

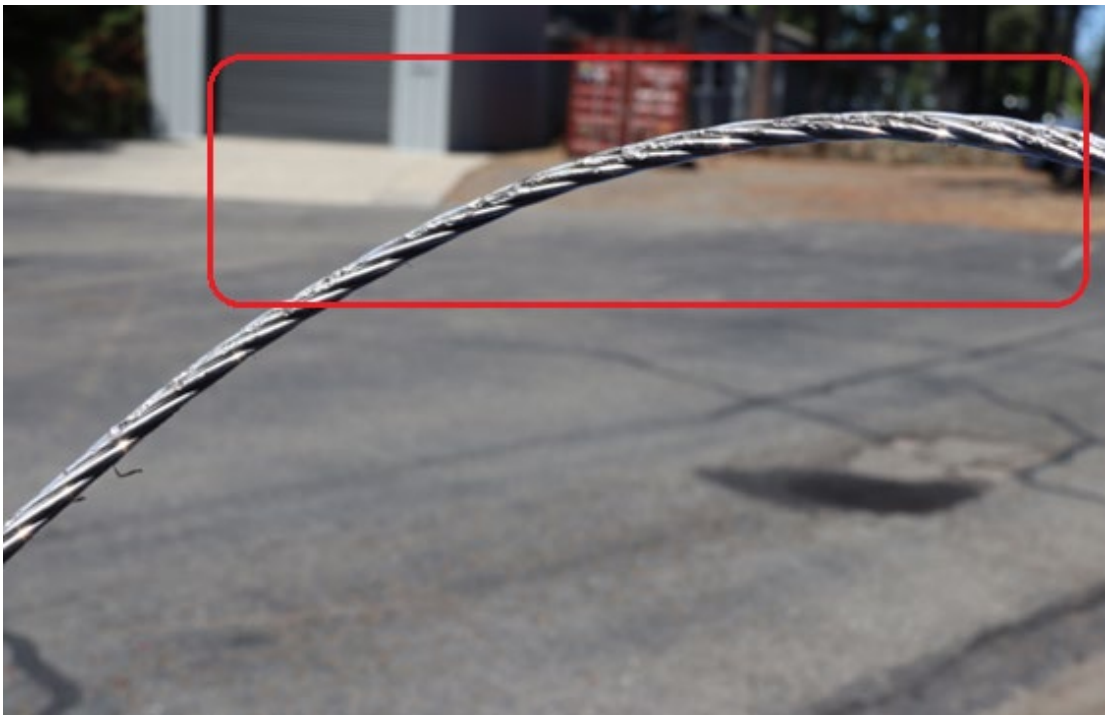

Figure 8: Messenger cable from Incident Pole 121678580 showing signs of arc damage.[13]

[12] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.
[13] Photograph taken by SED on July 9, 2024.

B. SED Document Review and Investigation

This section will discuss SED's review of utility standards, procedures, and inspection documents which were obtained through PG&E's 20-Day Report and subsequent Data Requests (DR) sent to the utility by SED.

SED requested detailed inspection and patrol records, intrusive test records conducted on the Incident Pole, and PG&E's VM routine inspection program to assess whether PG&E had prior knowledge and/or was required to mitigate the strike potential of the Subject Tree that fractured and damaged the Incident Pole.

The failed tree limb was 72 feet long and failed at a height of 26 feet up the main stem of the tree, 121 feet away from the Incident Pole.[14] PG&E stated that the failed tree was last inspected as part of a patrol inspection on June 6, 2024, and no trimming or external wounds were identified for the tree during the inspection.[15] PG&E performed an intrusive test inspection on the Incident Pole on September 9, 2007 and no issues were detected during the test and the Incident Pole passed.[16]

Moreover, PG&E inspected the Incident Pole on May 8, 2021 and July 7, 2023 and generated a work order in relation to a different tree near the Incident Pole that was causing strain and abrasion to the secondary service line conductor.[17] PG&E provided the inspection and work order from May 8, 2021, which shows the immediate threat posed to the secondary drop conductor from the nearby tree, as shown in Figure 9 below.

PG&E completed the work order by removing the tree and surrounding vegetation that had caused an abrasion on the Incident Pole on February 11, 2022.[18]

[14] Pay Fire Tree memo, August 4, 2024, p. 3.
[15] PG&E 20-day report, August 2, 2024, p. 3.
[16] PGE Data Request Response to DR01 Question 12(a), PGE-CPUC-PAY_00000387, October 28, 2024.
[17] PG&E Data Request Response to DR01 Question 15, 101417210 2021 and 101417210 2023, October 28, 2024.
[18] PG&E 20-Day Report, August 2, 2024, p. 3.

Figure 9: PG&E's May 8, 2021 detailed inspection showing immediate abrasion from a nearby tree on the Incident Pole.

Subsequently, PG&E again inspected the Incident Location in July 2023 and March 2024 during GO 165 annual patrols and did not find or identify any abnormal conditions in the area from any vegetation.

SED asked PG&E for its internal procedures related to its inspections of service drop conductors. PG&E responded that based on Electric Tariff Rule 16, Paragraph D, the customer is responsible for preventing damage or destruction to utility service facilities.[19] PG&E's Vegetation Management (VM) overhead inspection job aid, provided to SED, states that during electric asset inspections customer service drops are excluded from VM routine inspections.[20] PG&E further stated that GO 95, Rule 35 requires utilities to correct an unsafe condition (either by rearranging or replacing facilities, or by pruning vegetation) if it has actual knowledge that a service drop shows strain or abrasion from vegetation contact.[21] PG&E mitigated the immediate hazard and abrasion posed by a nearby tree to the Incident Pole on February 11, 2022. PG&E had not identified any other issues that would pose a hazard to the Incident Pole before the start of the Pay Fire on July 6, 2024.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed and examined in this investigation, SED found no violations by PG&E of any GO 95 or GO 165 requirements. Patrol and detailed inspections of the Incident Pole identified no equipment defects or abnormalities with the facilities that might have contributed to the incident. Infrared inspections and intrusive pole testing by PG&E discovered no issues with its facilities at the Incident Location. PG&E conducted VM inspections per the interval required in GO 95 and GO 165, which did not identify the Subject Tree as a potential hazard needing remediation. PG&E provided internal procedures showing that utility VM inspections on secondary service drop conductors are limited to monitoring for abrasion, strain, or an immediate hazard due to close contact from vegetation. PG&E's internal procedures require the customer to maintain a proper clearance for secondary drop conductors from any vegetation that could present a hazard to PG&E facilities. As the Subject Tree was 121 feet away from the Incident Pole and PG&E had no prior knowledge that the tree was a hazard to its facilities, PG&E was not responsible for monitoring the incident tree.

If SED becomes aware of additional information that could modify the findings in this report, the investigation may be re-opened. If so, SED may modify the report and take further action as appropriate.

[19] PG&E Data Request Response to DR02 Question 1, p. 1. January 17, 2025.
[20] PG&E Data Request Response to DR02 Question 2(a), p. 1. January 17, 2025.
[21] i.d.