



# CONSUMER AFFAIRS BRANCH

## FOURTH QUARTER REPORT

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February 2021



**California Public  
Utilities Commission**

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## About This Report

This quarterly report highlights consumer issues related to communications, electric, natural gas, and water utilities regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission.

Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this report are based on inquiries and complaints received by the Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB) from October through December 2020.

## This report details:

- [CAB Returned More Than \\$240,000 to Consumers This Quarter](#)
- [CAB Resolved 6,104 Informal Complaints in 2020](#)
- [Consumer Contacts Decreased Significantly in 2020 as Consumer Protections Went into Effect](#)
- [CAB Received Half as Many Public Safety Power Shutoff Contacts in 2020 Compared to 2019](#)
- [The Duration of Public Safety Power Shutoffs Decreased in 2020](#)
- [Contacts for Pacific Gas and Electric Public Safety Power Shutoffs Decreased in Both Number of Complaints and Geographic Footprint](#)

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## About the Consumer Affairs Branch

The Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB) resides within the News and Outreach Office at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). CAB is responsible for supporting the needs of consumers. CAB provides the following services:

- Resolves consumer questions or complaints about their regulated communications, natural gas, electric, and water utility services.
- Resolves appeals for California LifeLine, a discounted phone program.
- Administers Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs that assist consumers with telecommunications and energy issues.
- Analyzes complaint data to assist CPUC decision-makers, support enforcement against fraud and abuse and inform the public.

## CAB Returned More Than \$240,000 to Consumers This Quarter

In the fourth quarter, consumers were reimbursed **\$240,388** from the utilities by reaching out to CAB and utilizing the Informal Complaint process. Many of the refunds were the result of incorrect billing and were disbursed by the utility following contact by CAB.

TABLE 1. 2020 CONSUMER REFUNDS BY INDUSTRY AND QUARTER<sup>1</sup>

Industry	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter	Year to Date
Communications	\$ 114,271	\$ 220,369	\$ 153,103	\$ 101,246	\$ 588,990
Energy	\$ 169,246	\$ 337,642	\$ 234,399	\$ 134,570	\$ 875,857
Water	\$ 8,308	\$ 3,915	\$ 7,144	\$ 4,572	\$ 23,938
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 291,825</b>	<b>\$ 561,926</b>	<b>\$ 394,646</b>	<b>\$ 240,388</b>	<b>\$ 1,488,785</b>

<sup>1</sup> This table only accounts for refunds through the Informal Complaint process. Cases where a phone contact was transferred to the utility for expedited resolution are not reflected here.

### Fourth Quarter Consumer Refund Highlights

- AT&T California applied credit adjustments to a consumer’s account totaling **\$5,819.10**.
- A Net Energy Metering bill adjustment of **\$2,844.57** was issued to a customer of Southern California Edison.
- California Water Service Company reimbursed a consumer **\$855.00** for fees associated with the installation of a backflow prevention device.

### CAB Resolved 6,104 Informal Complaints in 2020

CAB’s Informal Complaint process allows consumers an easily accessible way to resolve disputes with their utility. In contrast to the CPUC’s Formal Complaint process, the Informal Complaint process does not require a formal proceeding or Administrative Law Judge oversight. Many consumers have utilized CAB’s Informal Complaint process; however, **15** consumers who had previously filed an Informal Complaint with CAB, elected to take further action and filed Formal Complaints with the CPUC in 2020.

Including the Informal Complaints that resulted in refunds for consumers, CAB resolved **6,104** Informal Complaints in 2020.

Apart from a slight uptick in the second quarter for Communications industry complaints, Table 2 displays a downward trend in Informal Complaints among the Communications and Energy industries from the first to the last quarter. The Water industry is an outlier, with no significant change throughout the year.

TABLE 2. INFORMAL CONSUMER COMPLAINTS CLOSED, 2020

Industry	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter	Year to Date
Communications	996	759	629	487	2,871
Energy	921	955	633	522	3,031
Water	56	45	43	58	202
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,973</b>	<b>1,759</b>	<b>1,305</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>6,104</b>

In 2020, the CPUC enacted consumer protection provisions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including service disconnection moratoriums. Subsequently, from March 15, 2020

through the end of December 2020, CAB assisted **218** consumers in need of payment arrangements with their utilities and helped another **224** consumers who had concerns about service disconnection for nonpayment during the pandemic.

Overall, **82** percent of all Informal Complaints processed by CAB in 2020 were categorized as billing (**49** percent) or service (**33** percent) across all industries.

## TEAM and CHANGES

In addition to the contacts received and the informal complaints forwarded to the utilities by CAB, the Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple-Languages ([TEAM](#)) and Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electric Services ([CHANGES](#)) programs assist Limited English Proficient (LEP) consumers with telecommunications and energy issues, respectively.

Support is provided statewide through **28** Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that work with LEP consumers in their preferred language with cultural sensitivity. The programs provide consumer outreach, education, needs assistance, and dispute resolution.

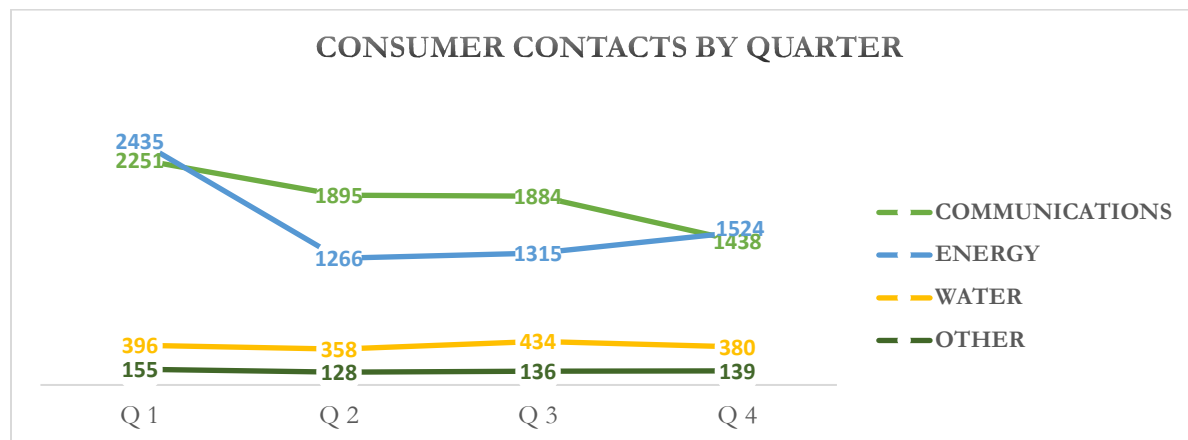
In the fourth quarter, just over 2,100 consumers were offered individual case support from CBO staff for a need (e.g., CARE/Lifeline or other financial assistance) or a dispute with a utility. This represents an increase of approximately 25 percent from the previous quarter. This indicates that efforts by the lead contractor and the individual CBOs to find more ways to enable consumers to report and receive support on their utility issues, is bearing fruit.

## Consumer Contacts Decreased Significantly in 2020 as Consumer Protections Went into Effect

In total, CAB received **16,134** consumer contacts during 2020. This is a significant decrease from 2019 where CAB received approximately 29,000 contacts. We attribute the decrease to the disconnection moratoriums that went into effect due to the COVID-19 emergency.

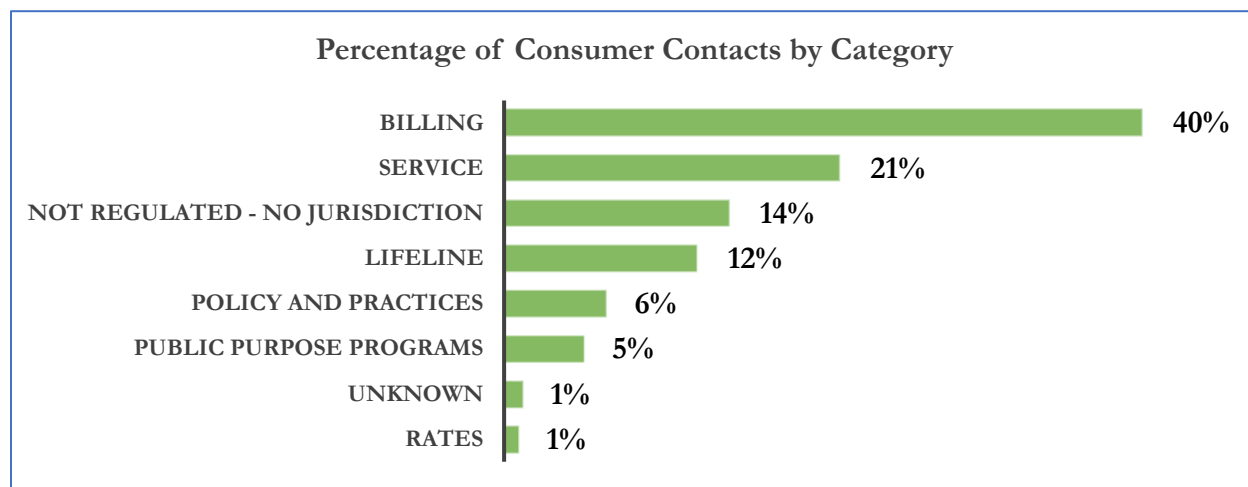
Chart 1 shows the downward trend in contacts across all industries from the first to the fourth quarter. This descending movement mirrors the downward trend of Informal Complaints in 2020. During 2020, CAB prioritized contacts related to payment arrangements and concerns about service disconnections.

CHART 1. CONSUMER CONTACTS BY INDUSTRY, YEAR TO DATE 2020



Most consumer contacts were categorized as billing (40 percent) or service (21 percent), see Chart 2.

CHART 2. CONSUMER CONTACTS BY CATEGORY, YEAR TO DATE 2020



## CAB Received Half as Many Public Safety Power Shutoff Contacts in 2020 Compared to 2019

Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) contacts reduced overall from 752 in 2019 to 365 in 2020. Despite the decrease in CAB PSPS contacts, some companies showed a marked increase in PSPS contacts in 2020 and average outage durations decreased for all IOUs. CAB receives the majority of its PSPS contacts in the fourth quarter of the year because weather is usually the driest between October and December; combined with hot temperatures and high winds which result in high fire risk conditions. The first PSPS event in 2019 performed



by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) occurred on June 7, 2019 and since that time there have been a total of 43 total PSPS events. Twenty-one PSPS events occurred in 2019 and 22 in 2020, affecting the lives of up to 975,000 people in a single PSPS event.

### The Duration of Public Safety Power Shutoffs Decreased in 2020

The table below summarizes PSPS events based on the utility post-event reports in 2019 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> Between 2019 and 2020, PG&E initiated fewer PSPS Events while Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric increased the number of PSPS events. Moreover, the average duration in PSPS events decreased for all three utilities.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF 2019 AND 2020 PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF EVENTS

2019				
Utility Name	PG&E	SCE	SDG&E	Totals
Total Number of PSPS Events	8	10	3	21
Total PSPS Duration (Days)	20	70	25	115
Average Customers Affected Per PSPS Event	313,576	23,609	16,240	
Average Duration Per PSPS Event (Days)	2.5	7	8.33	
2020				
Utility Name	PG&E	SCE	SDG&E	Totals
Total Number of PSPS Events	6	12	4	21
Total PSPS Duration (Days)	14	58	4	115
Average Customers Affected Per PSPS Event	108,843	17,133	2,805	
Average Duration Per PSPS Event (Days)	2.3	5	1.00	

### Contacts for Pacific Gas and Electric Public Safety Power Shutoffs Decreased in Both Number of Complaints and Geographic Footprint

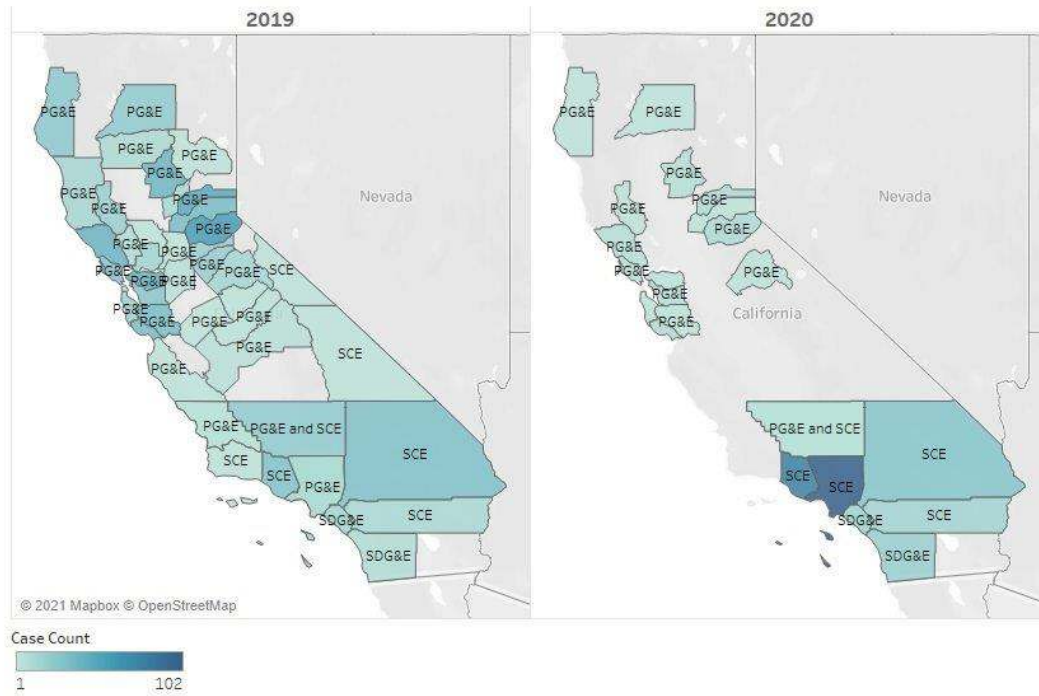
The map below illustrates the geographic distribution of PSPS consumer contacts for PG&E, SCE, and SDG&E. Contacts for PG&E PSPS events decreased in both number of complaints and geographic footprint. Contacts about SCE PSPS events increased significantly in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive summary is provided in the Appendix.



**PSPS Contacts Received by CAB - 2019 and 2020.**

IOUs include Pacific Gas and Electric, San Diego Gas & Electric, and Southern California Edison.



The accompanying tables below shows CAB consumer contacts received in 2019 and 2020. PG&E showed a 91% decrease in contacts in 2020 while SCE showed a 76% increase.

**TABLE 4. PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF CONTACTS - ENERGY UTILITIES**

<b>Energy</b>		
<b>Utility Name</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Pacific Gas & Electric Company	575	50
San Diego Community Power	0	1
San Diego Gas & Electric Company	8	19
Southern California Edison Company	140	245
Southern California Gas Company	1	0

TABLE 5. PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF CONTACTS - COMMUNICATIONS UTILITIES

Communications		
Utility Name	2019	2020
ATT California Inc.	17	13
Cellco Partnership	0	4
Charter Fiberlink CA-CCO, LLC	0	5
Comcast Phone of California, LLC	1	17
Frontier California Inc.	10	7
Non-Regulated	0	3

In addition to looking at the number of contacts received, CAB PSPS consumer contacts were categorized to better understand the issues consumers were facing during a PSPS event. In most cases, we found that consumers experience multiple issues in a single complaint. The categories listed below contain descriptions of consumer’s issues.

- **Communication:** Consumers cannot reach utility for information/Question about PSPS; either through customer service or website. Consumers reach the utility, but the utility has little or no information to give the consumer.
- **PSPS Policy:** Consumer demanding for utility to repair infrastructure and stop subjecting people to PSPS events. Consumer demands for CPUC to manage utilities better. Consumers calling to offer solutions to PSPS. Consumer calls to report de-energization when there are no winds.
- **Phone:** Consumers have no way to call when their cell phones/Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) lines and copper landlines are down because there is no power. The carrier previously removed generators from serving as backup power to landlines, and now there is no backup power.
- **Safety:** No Access to 911 services. Higher probability of fire because people use candles for light and improperly install/use generators.
- **Food:** Food spoilage (residential & commercial)
- **Health:** Consumers cannot use medical equipment and medications need refrigeration.
- **Economic:** Consumers complain of lost wages when their place of work is closed by outages, and businesses complain about lost revenues. Telecommuting consumers complain about work being affected by the outage as well as children not being able to attend online classes/schooling. Increased expenses for new

generators and the high cost of fuel to power them. Damaged devices and appliances.

- **Water:** Consumers not having access to running water when power is out if their water is supplied by a well. Livestock endangered because of lack of access to water.
- **Restoration Delay:** After the scheduled PSPS, consumers are still reporting substantial delay in power and/or phone restoration.

The table below shows the categorized CAB PSPS contacts in 2019 and 2020. This table includes all contacts for all companies. Since a consumer can cite multiple issues in a single contact, each consumer contact could be attributed to more than one category.

In 2019 and 2020, PSPS Policy was the top complaint category when it comes to CAB PSPS contacts. Many consumers also reached out to CAB regarding poor communication from the utility customer service during PSPS events as well as difficulty reaching the utility for information about PSPS events. Loss of refrigeration which affects food/medication, which also ties into health/safety risks, were among the main concerns for consumers in PSPS affected areas.

**TABLE 6. PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF CONTACTS BY CATEGORY**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Communication	153	44
Economic	127	52
Food	137	76
Health	114	67
Phone	59	80
Restoration Delay	70	50
Safety	63	79
Water	50	10
PSPS Policy	459	298

The table below compares PG&E and SCE in issue categories that are indicators of customer service. CAB reviewed the contact categories for both companies to learn how PG&E-related contacts to CAB decreased by 91% reduction in 2020 and SCE’s increased in 2020.

PG&E’s decrease in PSPS events as well as PSPS duration contributed to fewer contacts to CAB. Fewer contacts regarding Restoration Delay and Communication were an indication of PG&E possibly improving customer service during PSPS events.

SCE’s 2020 performance appears to have worsened as consumers were increasingly dissatisfied with SCE’s management of PSPS events. Even though the average duration decreased, there was still an increase in outages as well as a substantial increase in Restoration Delay complaints and Safety concerns in 2020.

**TABLE 7. COMPARISON OF PG&E AND SCE PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF CONTACTS RELATED TO CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Utility Name	Category	2019	2020
<b>Pacific Gas &amp; Electric Company</b> Total Contacts: (575 in 2019); (50 in 2020)	PSPS Policy	371	46
	Communication	119	5
	Restoration Delay	48	3
	Safety	38	6
<b>Southern California Edison Company</b> Total Contacts: (140 in 2019); (246 in 2020)	PSPS Policy	79	213
	Communication	30	32
	Restoration Delay	16	40
	Safety	12	46

**Appendix - 2019 and 2020 PSPS Events Summary**

**Figure 1**

<b>PSPS Post-Event Report Summary 2019</b>					
<b>Utility Name</b>	<b>Event Start</b>	<b>Event End</b>	<b>Customers Affected</b>	<b>Counties Affected</b>	<b>Counties Affected</b>
PG&E	6/7/2019	6/9/2019	22,000	North Bay & Sierra Foothills	2
PG&E	9/25/2019	9/27/2019	26,121	North Bay & Sierra Foothills	2
PG&E	10/5/2019	10/6/2019	11,300	Butte, Yuba, Plumas	3
PG&E	10/9/2019	10/12/2019	732,348	Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou Solano, Sonoma, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, Yuba, Alameda, Alpine, Calaveras, Contra Costa, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Kern, Tuolumne	35
PG&E	10/23/2019	10/25/2019	177,000	Sierras, North Bay, Peninsula, Kern	17
PG&E	10/26/2019	11/1/2019	975,000	<b>Linked Event</b>	38
PG&E	10/29/2019	11/1/2019	515,838	<b>Linked Event</b>	28
PG&E	11/20/2019	11/21/2019	49,000	North Bay, North Valley (North & South), Northern Sierra, Shasta	5
SCE	6/17/2019	6/22/2019	6,500	Los Angeles, San Bernardino	2
SCE	6/28/2019	7/8/2019	8,900	Kern, Riverside, San Bernardino	3
SCE	7/9/2019	7/21/2019	3,910	Kern, Riverside	2
SCE	8/12/2019	8/17/2019	1,852	Los Angeles, Kern, Riverside, Tulare	4
SCE	9/4/2019	9/8/2019	650	Santa Barbara, Inyo, Mono, Kern, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Tulare	8
SCE	10/2/2019	10/12/2019	24,112	Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, and Tulare	9
SCE	10/12/2019	10/21/2019	444	Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, and San Bernardino	4
SCE	10/21/2019	10/26/2019	31,386	Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura	7
SCE	10/27/2019	11/4/2019	126,364	Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Madera, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Tulare, Tuolumne, and Ventura	12
SCE	11/15/2019	11/17/2019	31,975	los angeles, riverside, san bernardino, ventura	4
SDGE	10/10/2019	10/11/2019	395	San Diego/Orange	1
SDGE	10/20/2019	11/1/2019	20,621	Weather Event 2 - San Diego	1
SDGE	10/20/2019	11/1/2019	27,703	Weather Event 3 - San Diego	1

Figure 2

PSPS Post-Event Report Summary 2020					
Utility	Start Date	End Date	Customers Affected	County	Counties Affected
PacifiCorp	9/13/2020	9/13/2020	2,557	Siskiyou	1
PacifiCorp	10/25/2020	10/25/2020	0	PSPS Did Not Occur	2
PG&E	9/7/2020	9/10/2020	171,947	Northern CA & small areas in the south	
PG&E	9/27/2020	9/29/2020	64,297	Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Lake, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Sonoma, Tehama, Yuba	15
PG&E	10/14/2020	10/17/2020	40,574	Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Humboldt, Lake, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Plumas, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, Yuba	19
PG&E	10/21/2020	10/23/2020	30,154	Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Plumas, Shasta, Tehama, Yolo	7
PG&E	10/25/2020	10/28/2020	345,470	Alameda, Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo, Yuba	35
PG&E	12/2/2020	12/3/2020	617	Kern	1
SCE	5/27/2020	5/30/2020	0	PSPS Did Not Occur	0
SCE	6/25/2020	6/28/2020	0	PSPS Did Not Occur	0
SCE	7/31/2020	8/4/2020	14	Antelope Valley	1
SCE	9/5/2020	9/11/2020	252	LA, Ventura	2
SCE	10/16/2020	10/16/2020	86	LA, Ventura	2
SCE	10/23/2020	10/28/2020	36,307	Kern, Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside	6
SCE	11/3/2020	11/7/2020	1,335	Inyo, Mono, San Bernardino	3
SCE	11/14/2020	11/18/2020	517	Inyo, Mono, Kern, LA	4
SCE	11/24/2020	11/28/2020	20,687	Kern, LA, Ventura, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino	6
SCE	11/28/2020	12/4/2020	51,407	Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Ventura	5
SCE	12/4/2020	12/14/2020	73,137	Inyo, Kern, Mono, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura	9
SCE	12/16/2020	12/24/2020	21,849	Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura	6
SDG&E	9/8/2020	9/9/2020	49	San Diego	1
SDG&E	9/28/2020	9/29/2020	0	PSPS Did Not Occur	
SDG&E	10/26/2020	10/27/2020	4,373	San Diego	1
SDG&E	12/23/2020	12/24/2020	6,797	Orange, San Diego	2