

# PG&E to Double Up Vegetation Management

By Nick Marnell



Not a symbiotic relationship.

Photo N. Marnell

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company annually prunes and removes trees that pose dangers to power lines. During this year of extreme dry conditions and high fire danger the company will conduct two separate vegetation management programs in all three Lamorinda municipalities.

In Moraga, the utility identified the area around Scofield Drive and Harold Drive for power line maintenance. "The list we got from PG&E regarding their annual electric line pruning clearly identifies 180 trees scheduled for removal," said Jill Keimach, town manager. But public works director Edric Kwan said he has not yet received a map showing the exact locations of the condemned trees.

PG&E said that the maintenance around transmission power lines in Orinda will be done primarily from Bear Creek Road, crossing Highway 24 west to Moraga Way and also from Scofield Road running west to Moraga Way. "Our planning director, Emmanuel Ursu, requested a list from PG&E and it appears that the vast majority of subject trees are on East Bay Municipal Utility District, PG&E and East Bay Regional Park District properties," said Orinda city manager Janet Keeter.

The Lafayette work area related to transmission power lines is between the Highway 24/680 crossing west to Pleasant Hill Road, and along

Olympic Boulevard to St. Mary's Road. "You'll see Davey Tree around Lamorinda every summer trimming branches," said Steven Falk, city manager. "Lafayette, at least, views this as part of the utility's routine maintenance and does not consider it to be controversial."

"Although we don't yet have a specific date, the tree work is expected to begin soon and PG&E is in the process of communicating details of the upcoming work to private property owners and city officials," said company spokeswoman Tamar Sarkissian. She said that the work will not begin until all PG&E customers are notified. In addition to work on the transmission lines, residents can expect to see routine vegetation compliance work performed along PG&E's distribution power lines throughout the area.

PG&E also plans to launch its Pipeline Pathways Project in Lamorinda, likely to begin this fall. The goal of this controversial program is to remove trees from within 10 feet of gas mains. The utility is currently working with Concord and Walnut Creek on a set of deal points that would control how the trees are selected for removal, according to Falk. "I predict that the Lamorinda cities won't hear from PG&E about the gas program until the utility has worked out its issues with those other two cities," he said.

## More High Fire Risks

Lamorinda's fire marshals pointed out two additional areas in their districts that they think have potential for serious vegetation fires.

"The biggest problems have been on the lines between Rossmoor and Lafayette," said Robert Marshall of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. "Three of the past four years there has been a fire in that area." He explained that animals – mostly birds and squirrels – will sit on a charged wire, get electrocuted and fall to the ground. The heat from the fried animal can start a fire in the three foot high grass. "The short answer is north Orinda, wherever the high power lines come in," said Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Kathy Leonard. "And the thick vegetation around and below the power lines in Lost Valley is a big concern," she added.

Marshall cautioned Lamorinda weekend vegetation managers. "While PG&E does trim around the utility poles, they don't trim from the pole to your house," he said. "If you have a lot of trees, call PG&E. Don't try to trim the trees yourself. Even though those wires are insulated, they are still dangerous."

## Civic News Moraga

### Development Projects Look for Fall Approval

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During an earlier review, design review board members expressed support for the project but asked for additional details to increase the visual appeal of the project as seen from Moraga Way.

The fire district wrote a letter in June expressing concerns regarding the potential conflict between fire training operations conducted at station 41 and residents. Training exercises can create temporary noise, unexpected water off-site, and visual impacts from equipment, ladders and personnel that could be disruptive. MOFD recommended that disclosures make these potential impacts clear to prospective buyers.

The second project, a Signature Properties development at 489 Moraga Road, proposes 18 single-family, high-density homes on a two-acre lot across from the Rheem Shopping Center. Signature Homes has been working with town staff and the planning commission since 2011 in a number of study sessions. The challenge for commissioners was to visualize the impact on the scenic corridor just by looking at maps and drawings; the story poles materialized it for them. According to town staff, the project will be formally reviewed by the commission on July 21 and could be approved before the end of the year.




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