

Published September 18th, 2019

## Safety of 40-foot section of exposed pipeline in Briones questioned

By Pippa Fisher



The exposed, high-pressure PG&E pipeline near the Springhill neighborhood is unsupported at each end and sags mid-span. Photos provided

Regional Park. It lies across an eroding creek bank, with trees looming over the pipe in an area where other trees have recently fallen.

"Aside from the potential of falling trees, the span seems unsupported at either end with a slight sag mid-span," say GSTF members Michael and Gina Dawson in an email Sept. 5 to the city council. "The area where the pipeline emerges from the soil is eroding. There is coating damage with bare steel exposed to atmospheric conditions and the span is in a high fire zone."

PG&E says the pipeline is safe. An email statement from PG&E spokesperson Tamar Sarkissian on Sept. 11 reads, "The safety of our customers and the communities that we serve is PG&E's most important responsibility. The pipeline in Briones Regional Park is safe."

However, a letter dated Sept. 13 from Contra Costa County Fire Protection District Deputy Fire Chief Aaron McAlister to PG&E expresses the fire district's concern following an evaluation of the situation.

McAlister notes the district's specific worries concern the pipeline's location, open to the public and immediately adjacent to a public access area, saying that "I am concerned that a person could use the pipe as a walkway adding weight to the pipe and causing further degradation of its strength and integrity." The district is concerned too with the potential for wild land fire, and the possibility for seismic activity in the area further threatening the integrity of the pipe.

Michael Dawson thanked the city council for its prompt response to his email at the Sept. 9 city council meeting as he took advantage of time set aside for Public Comment to reinforce how deeply concerned the task force is about the safety of this 70-year-old pipeline. He pointed out that the utility has cut over 245 trees in Briones as part of the CPSI, including some just steps away from the pipeline, while ignoring "the real threat."

Vice Mayor Susan Candell expressed her gratitude for the group's work in identifying the potential risk. She said that she had just got off the phone with a PG&E engineer who had been out to the site and visually inspected it. According to Candell, the engineer shared her concern and said that it would be fixed.

Sarkissian also expressed PG&E's gratitude for the resident's work. "We appreciate these customers asking questions about this pipeline," and she said that the pipeline has been and continues to be monitored as part of ongoing maintenance activities.

"We are revisiting the site and gathering more detailed data to ensure continued safe operation," says Sarkissian. "If any precautionary steps are identified, we will take action right away."

Following PG&E's work earlier this year to cover up exposed pipeline along the Lafayette-Moraga Trail, the CPUC requested a report on all exposed pipelines in Lafayette.

Gina Dawson says, "For reasons PG&E has yet to identify, this span was not included in Lafayette exposed pipeline reporting requested by the CPUC," adding that PG&E reported 14 other exposed pipeline sections on

three of the five transmission pipelines running through Lafayette. "This unreported section is in addition to eight other exposed sections identified within a seven-mile stretch of this same 'high volume, high pressure' pipeline route, L-191-1," she says.

"It's very interesting that the PG&E engineer confirmed to Susan Candell that repairs would need to be made, just on the basis of one visual check," says Gina Dawson. "If this span was monitored by regulatory standard, which we may never know if we do not get the records we requested, it seems PG&E should have identified the threats and mitigated the risks well before residents had to point it out."

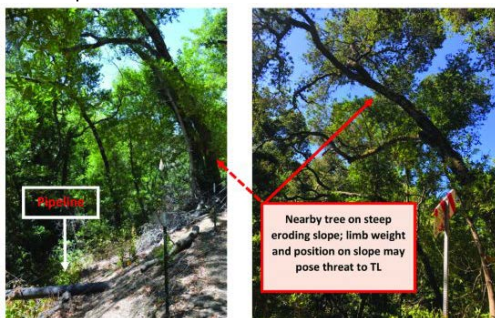
Gina Dawson says that whether or not the omission of the 40-foot span was intentional, it undermines trust in PG&E information and the company's ability to identify safety threats. "If we cannot trust the integrity of the information PG&E provides us, how can we subsequently trust integrity of PG&E's safety programs and that of the pipeline itself?"

"Why is PG&E focusing on CPSI tree removals that pose no measurable threat, and meanwhile leave dangerous tree hazards like this?" Michael Dawson asks, referring to the tree that is in danger of falling onto the exposed pipeline.

PG&E management informed the GSTF Sept. 11 that they were currently inspecting the section of pipeline and would be providing them with a more detailed response, likely within a week.



Photos provided



Nearby trees on eroding creek bank and slope may pose hazard to span Photos provided

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