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Orinda prepares for potential power shutoffs

By Sora O'Doherty

The threat of COVID-19 has caused the city of Orinda to rethink its plans for providing assistance to residents during potential upcoming Pacific Gas and Electric Co. public safety power shutoffs (PSPSs). During fire season, under certain circumstances, including red flag warnings, the presence of gusty high winds, low humidity and hot weather, PG&E will schedule PSPSs in order to reduce the risk of fires starting by PG&E transmission equipment. Last year Orinda staff provided services, including cooling and charging for electronic devices, in Room 8 of the Community Center. This year, with the threat of transmission of the novel coronavirus, public works thinks it will be safer to provide such services in the library parking lot and on the library terrace. With little going on at the library, the parking lot is little used and can be closed off to provide a shaded place with good ventilation and plenty of space for social distancing.

City engineer Jason Chen explained Orinda's plans to the city council at its Sept. 1 meeting.

Chen told the council that PG&E plans to reduce the time needed for visual inspection of power lines, cutting the time needed to restore power in half. PG&E has also promised to notify customers of upcoming PSPSs two days before the outage, one day before, just before, during the actual outage and once after power has been restored. In addition, customers can view the seven-day potential for a PSPS on the PG&E website. During a PSPS, the city will operate out of the Sarge Littlehale Conference Room. Residents using the community resources center will be required to wear masks and to provide basic contact information in case contact tracing is required later. Staff agreed to a request by Vice Mayor Amy Worth to provide small bottles of water. Portable toilets will be provided and will be cleaned frequently. In the event that smoke becomes too much of an issue, the CRC will be moved to the Founders Auditorium and Room 8 of the Community Center.

Owing to reduced staffing, no temporary stop signs will be provided during a PSPS, but people should remember that in the event of a power outage, intersections normally controlled by traffic signals should be treated as four-way stops. The expected cost to prepare for an upcoming PSPS is about \$5,000, including \$3,000 for temporary toilets and \$2,000 for other supplies. It is expected that total costs for PSPSs will not exceed \$10,000.

Further information about PSPSs can be found on PG&E's website:

https://www.pge.com/en_US/safety/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster/wildfires/psps-weather-map.page?WT.mc_id=Vanity_weather

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