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## Was PG&E Prepared for Gas Leak Response?

By Nick Marnell

Moraga-Orinda Fire District board president Steve Anderson and director Fred Weil, speaking as private citizens, assailed the response of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company to the Rheem Blvd. gas line rupture caused by the March 13 Moraga sinkhole.

"From all I could see, we as a district did all that was necessary," said Weil, speaking at the conclusion of the March 16 district meeting. "What I thought was interesting was how unprepared PG&E was to deal with it. They were completely at a loss."

Weil said he went to the Rheem staging area about 8:30 that Sunday evening and "saw more trucks and guys standing around than you would see at any PG&E location. I asked one of the techs what they were doing and he said, 'We're waiting for instructions.'"

"It looked like a PG&E convention, with a lot of people standing around, drinking coffee," said Anderson.

"PG&E gave the technicians a list of houses and they couldn't vary from it. Trucks would get to one area and they'd skip lines of houses because they weren't on the list. When the techs got to the end of their list, they had to stop and wait for more instructions as to when to go," said Weil.

"PG&E told the media there were 300 homes left. They'd be orange-tagged because they weren't home that night. It didn't happen," said Weil. "The problem was not with the technicians; they were great," continued Weil. "The problem was with PG&E management. If their process for evaluating how they responded is anything like their reports to the media, don't trust it."

The company declined to directly respond to Weil's comments. "Our customers want reassurance that they're being kept safe every day," said Nick Stimmel, PG&E spokesman. "That's why we responded immediately with first responders to restore gas service to 2,500 customers in Moraga after a sink hole damaged one of our gas lines. We share the community's intense focus on public safety. That's why we brought in our gas service teams from all over Northern and Central California to go door-to-door restoring service and conducting safety checks on appliances. We're making sure our customers know that we're here to help."

"If we ever have a bigger disaster, given PG&E performance on this one, it would be much worse," said Weil. "PG&E will not be organized enough to restore the service. In their current state, they do not know how to do it."

"It was a huge undertaking," said MOFD public information officer Dennis Rein, who assisted the town in its emergency operations center. "PG&E's top priority was maintaining safety and restoring service to their customers."

"I am very pleased with the district's response and I am proud of the job that we did," added MOFD Fire Chief Stephen Healy.

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[back](#)

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