

# Testimony on the Impact of the Sonoma County PG&E Power Shutoffs on Medically Fragile Older Adults and Residents with Disabilities



**From October 8 through November 2019, Sonoma County experienced four PG&E Power Shutoffs (PSPS) that created emergency situations for many medically fragile older adults and residents with disabilities or mobility issues. During these multi-day outages, the Human Services Department Adult and Aging Division staff were overwhelmed by the high number of resident contacts and case management work needed to safeguard these vulnerable residents.**

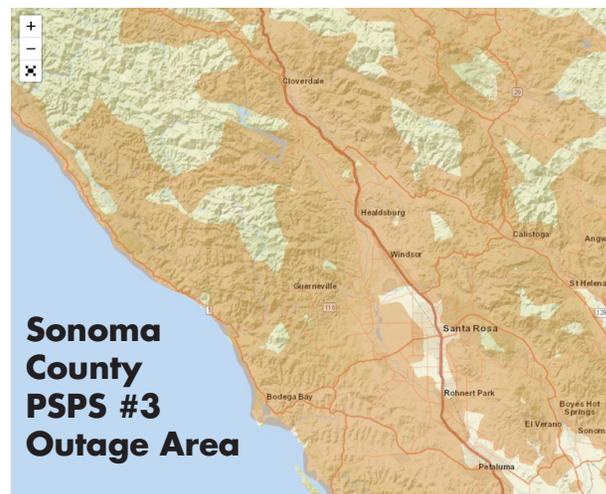
In preparation for and during the outages, the Adult and Aging Division took the lead in contacting and supporting its In-Home Supportive Services clients, plus, with help from the City of Santa Rosa, those additional, non-client residents with electrical-dependent medical devices from the PG&E Medical Baseline list and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services list of Medicare recipients. Sonoma County 2-1-1 also fielded PSPS-related calls and referred residents to Adult and Aging for help with electrical-dependent medical devices and other issues.

Because of the high number of residents in need, 80 HSD staff were diverted from their regular work at several points to make calls and home contacts. Other essential work, such as

Adult Protective Services investigations and in-home case management and assessments, had to be put on hold to ensure residents' safety and well-being during the PSPS events.

Tragically, during PSPS #2, the Kincadee fire emergency began, with mandatory evacuations of 200,000 residents. The Human Services Department is responsible for Care and Shelter during a disaster, and Adult and Aging staff also had to meet the needs of the hundreds of elderly, medically fragile or disabled residents in the evacuation shelters.

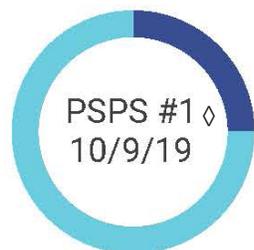
Throughout these events, the County of Sonoma provided vital resources to vulnerable individuals and families in need. Services included: Hotel stays, transportation, battery backups for medical devices, medication, food and water, flashlights, landline phones and ice.



## A Few Residents' Stories

- Due to the PSPS, then a mandatory fire evacuation, an older couple was forced to call for ambulance transport to the hospital for the wife, who is non-ambulatory, dependent on a ventilator and life-sustaining electrical equipment. Unsure how long the PSPS would last, they couldn't count on limited battery backup to power her devices, nor could they afford a home generator. They now live in fear about whether they can ensure her safety the next time a PSPS occurs.
- An 81-year-old with significant functional limitations living in a second story apartment requires twice-a-day nebulizer treatments to breathe. In order to continue her treatments when her building's elevator didn't work, her care provider and volunteers carried her down and up stairs twice daily, then drove her to a location with power for her device.
- A single mother of three, including a child with significant medical issues, lives in a trailer that relies on electricity for heat. By day three of PSPS #2, their home was so cold that she put her kids in the car and drove with the heater on to get warm. She was able to connect with Adult & Aging staff who arranged to pay for the family to stay in a hotel room for the night.

# Data on the Impact of Sonoma County PG&E Power Shutoffs on Medically Fragile Older Adults and Residents with Disabilities



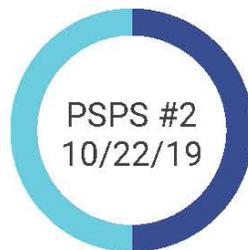
PSPS #1  
10/9/19

## Community Impact

 **66,000** Sonoma County residents impacted

 **3,949** Medically fragile\* residents impacted

 **1,419** Phone calls to medically fragile



PSPS #2  
10/22/19

## Community Impact

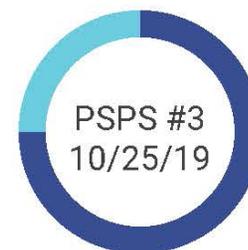
 **27,824** Sonoma County residents impacted

 **1,262** Medically fragile residents impacted

 **170** Additional phone calls to medically fragile



10/23/19  
Kincade Fire begins



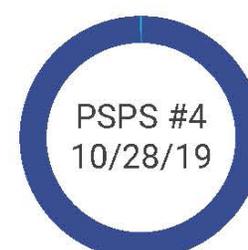
PSPS #3  
10/25/19

## Community Impact

 **93,000** Sonoma County residents impacted

 **3,292** Medically fragile residents impacted

 **280** Additional phone calls to medically fragile



PSPS #4  
10/28/19

## Community Impact

 **87,000** Sonoma County residents impacted

 **2,916** Medically fragile residents impacted

 **497** Additional phone calls to medically fragile

\*Medically fragile residents included those from In-Home Support Services, the PG&E Medical Baseline List and Medicare recipients with electrically dependent medical devices.

◇A proposed PSPS on 09/24/19, set to affect 33,000 PG&E customers was ultimately limited to 1,000. However, Adult and Aging Division staff had made 483 calls to alert the original 1,077 affected clients to help them prepare for their safety and well-being.

**The Sonoma County Adult and Aging Division is not staffed with the high number of personnel necessary to respond to all vulnerable residents who need help during a PG&E PSPS.**

We suggest two ways that PG&E could help ensure that there are sufficient trained personnel to protect those that need help:

- PG&E could hire social workers or public health personnel who could make contact with those registered on its Medical Baseline List.
- PG&E could contract with the County of Sonoma to hire the personnel to manage the resident contacts from its Medical Baseline List.

For more information, contact Director of Emergency Management Christopher Godley at [christopher.godley@sonoma-county.org](mailto:christopher.godley@sonoma-county.org)