

SoCal Edison settles public entity wildfire claims for \$360M

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The utility giant facing thousands of claims linked to Southern California fires in 2017 and 2018 reached a \$360 million settlement Wednesday with public entities.

Equipment belonging to the Southern California Edison Co. was blamed for sparking the Thomas and Woolsey fires. The Thomas Fire sparked Dec. 4, 2017 and charred over 281,000 acres in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. A month later, the subsequent debris flow swept through the tony enclave of Montecito, which resulted in more than 21 deaths.

The Woolsey Fire sparked Nov. 8, 2018 and burned over 96,000 acres in Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

Wednesday's settlement involves 26 deals made with 23 different public entities that have claims.

Although a \$1 billion resolution was reached in June between 18 public entities and Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for the 2015 Butte Fire, 2017 Northern California fires and the 2018 Camp Fire, "this is the most comprehensive public entity wildfire resolution to date," said John P. Fiske, shareholder at Baron & Budd P.C., who represents public entity plaintiffs impacted by Thomas and Woolsey fires. Fiske's firm was also involved in the PG&E settlement.

"It's nice that public entities can receive compensation now to repay public resources and taxpayer losses, so they can help communities rebuild," Fiske added.

Per the settlement terms, Edison will pay for damages to 23 public entities affected by each disaster with \$150 million allocated to the Thomas Fire and mudslide. The remaining \$210 million will be paid for damages arising out of the Woolsey Fire.

The agreements are not an admission of wrongdoing, the company said.

"We are pleased to reach agreements to resolve the claims brought by local government entities related to the 2017 and 2018 events," said Pedro J. Pizarro, president and CEO of Edison International, the parent company of SoCal Edison. "We look forward to engaging with other parties who have a similar interest in good faith settlement efforts. We also will continue to make substantial investments in our system and enhance our operational practices to reduce the risk of wildfires in our service area and safely provide power to homes and businesses."

The settlements reached with public entities won't affect lawsuits filed by individual plaintiffs or businesses affected by all three events, nor would it impact the cross-complaints Edison filed

against the county, city of Santa Barbara, its flood control district, Montecito Water District and the California Department of Transportation in connection with the mudslide.