

PG&E Pleads Guilty to 84 Homicides in Camp Fire

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"Guilty, your honor."

Pacific Gas & Electric Co.'s chief executive officer Bill Johnson uttered that phrase 84 times Tuesday, admitting during arraignment that the utility killed 84 people in the devastating Camp Fire that wiped out the town of Paradise in 2018.

Under the agreement with Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey, PG&E will pay more than \$3.5 million in fines: \$10,000 for each of the victims, and a maximum fine of \$50,000 for unlawfully causing the fire.

The company also admitted special allegations of causing great bodily injury to several victims. A multi-day sentencing hearing will resume Wednesday with hundreds of victims making impact statements.

Johnson is leaving his post at the end of the month, the same time the utility is scheduled to exit bankruptcy. After entering the guilty pleas, he apologized to the victims, admitting corporate misconduct that resulted in the most destructive wildfire in state history.

"No words from me could ever reduce the magnitude of such devastation or do anything to repair the damages," Johnson said. "But I hope the actions we are taking here today will help bring some measure of peace. I wish there were some way to take back what happened or take away the pain of those who've suffered. But I know there's not. What I can say is this: PG&E will never forget the Camp Fire and all that it took from this region."

The utility is working to compensate victims, Johnson said. PG&E reached agreement on \$25.5 billion in settlements with wildfire victims, Butte County agencies, and others -- \$13.5 billion of which will go directly to victims affected by 2017 and 2018 wildfires in Northern California.

That settlement is pending in U.S. Bankruptcy Court. Judge [Dennis J. Montali](#) is scheduled to issue a written order Wednesday approving PG&E's \$59 billion reorganization plan.

Following the arraignment, Ramsey released the full investigation report into the Camp Fire, which was caused by a broken "C-hook" at a transmission tower that caused a high-voltage power line to fall onto dry vegetation below.

The utility learned nothing from the 2010 pipeline explosion in San Bruno that killed eight people, the district attorney said. In San Bruno, PG&E failed to inspect aging transmission lines, which is what happened in Paradise nearly a decade later, the district attorney said. PG&E is on criminal probation for the pipeline explosion but faced no homicide charges.

PG&E reduced inspections on older lines, didn't conduct patrols and held off on repairs to save money, according to the investigation. Though PG&E personnel were questioned during grand jury proceedings, there was not sufficient evidence to indict any individual, the district attorney said.

PG&E's officials however, are on notice, Ramsey warned. Johnson's successor and the utility's board have to improve their conduct or face personal liability, he said.

While no individual was criminally prosecuted, Ramsey said, "It was not for a lack of trying on our grand jury in looking through all of the evidence."

An individual would have to have been personally aware of the omissions or other behavior that rose to criminal negligence, he said.

It would've been impossible to prove PG&E's prior leaders made decisions about its infrastructure in 1995 knowing it would lead to the catastrophic fire risk, Ramsey said.

"Are we satisfied with the punishment? No. But we are getting a punishment for a corporation that's the maximum that California law allows," Ramsey said during a news conference.

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