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Trials scheduled over 2 Southern California wildfires

Two southern California wildfire cases are set to go to trial early 2020.

Back-to-back trials were scheduled for early 2020 in litigation over the Thomas and Woolsey wildfires, which devastated parts of Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

The Thomas fire cases will begin Jan. 13, 2020, Superior Court Judge [Daniel J. Buckley](#) said Wednesday

The Thomas fire began Dec. 4, 2017 and burned more than 281,000 acres in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. The Woolsey Fire began Nov. 8, 2018 and burned more than 96,000 acres in Ventura and Los Angeles counties.

Southern California Edison's equipment has been blamed for both wildfires. The utility is being sued by thousands of plaintiffs in both mass tort cases consolidated in Los Angeles County. *Southern California Fires* JCCP 4965.

The time estimate for the first Thomas fire bellwether trial is between four to six weeks. The second Thomas trial will start sometime in July.

Buckley told counsel on Wednesday to decide how the bellwether plaintiffs would be chosen. Plaintiff and defense counsel have been negotiating whether cases should be chosen randomly to make the litigation fairer.

The judge denied Edison's request to have a mini two-week trial on the cause and origin of the Thomas fire, stating it was unnecessary to have duplicate testimony from fire investigators and expert witnesses.

Buckley discussed the possibility of doing a bellwether trial from the litigation related to the Montecito mudslide that began Jan. 9, 2018, just after the Thomas fire. The mudslide caused 23 deaths, although two bodies have not been accounted for.

The first Woolsey fire bellwether trial will begin Feb. 10, 2020 and is expected to last between 10-15 days. Southern California Fires JCCP 5000.

The second bellwether trial related to Woolsey will begin July 20, 2020, Judge [William Highberger](#) ruled Wednesday, adding that the commencement of trial would depend on when the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) publicly releases its report.

Edison's attorneys from Hueston Hennigan LLP were denied, without prejudice, a motion to extend their deadline to file a possible cross complaint against the Boeing Co. Highberger ruled that the deadline to do so was Wednesday. The fire is believed to have started on a Boeing facility.

Doug J. Dixon maintained they needed an extra month to see if they could bring in other parties believed to be liable for the fire, depending on the results of the Cal Fire report.

Other plaintiffs' counsel argued it would be better for Edison to bring in Boeing as a cross-defendant sooner than a month after the Cal Fire report is released. Highberger agreed.

To speed up the process, the stay on liability discovery was lifted, along with the damages discovery as to public entity plaintiffs, which includes cities, counties, and fire/water districts. Highberger has yet to decide if the first bellwether trial in February would include public entities.

The next status conference for both fire cases was scheduled for July 9.