

Power cut to most of area

Group targets PG&E as 'corporate rapist'

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Staff writers

Most of Santa Cruz County was without power for much of the day today, after vandals toppled a 100-foot steel-latticed transmission tower near Salsipuedes Creek and damaged another transmission tower in Morgan Hill.

Today's outages followed smaller incidents of vandalism yesterday, a PG&E spokeswoman said. A wooden power distribution line pole was sawn in two yesterday near Green Valley Road, causing a two-hour outage from Watsonville to Santa Cruz from about 10:45 a.m. Another wooden power pole was cut in two later in the day, but did not affect power distribution, PG&E said.

An FBI spokesman said a group calling itself the Earth Night Action Group delivered notes this morning claiming responsibility for at least some of the incidents to the Associated Press, the San Francisco Examiner and Bay City News Service.

The FBI is now investigating the incidents in Watsonville. A spokesman said the federal agency is involved because such acts of vandalism violate the Hazardous Liquid Pipeline Act of 1979. The penalty for interrupting a major source of power is up to 10 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine.

PG&E was able to reroute most power from yesterday incidents and this morning's Salsipuedes Creek sabotage without much trouble, according to spokesman Greg Pruett. The Morgan Hill

transmission tower incident at 8:55 this morning, however, isolated the county from a 115,000-volt line that originates from a grid running down the middle of the state, Pruett said.

As a result, Santa Cruz County officials estimated that 95 percent of the county was without power from about 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. today. PG&E said 95,000 customers from Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Morgan Hill and Hollister were without power.

At press time, PG&E crews still had not determined what caused the Morgan Hill transmission tower lines to be severed. Pruett said a 2,000-foot span of charged wires was down. He said it is not impossible for someone who knows how the lines are attached to sever the lines without electrocuting himself.

Pruett, speaking from the PG&E office in San Francisco, said the company hasn't experienced any vandalism on today's scale since the early 1970s.

At Salsipuedes Creek near Highway 129 this morning, the downed transmission tower lay on its side, with charged power lines splayed across the levee, the creek and the lettuce field it stood in.

PG&E transmission superintendent Orland Silva said one or more vandals must have sneaked into the field last night and unscrewed all the 3/4-inch bolts that held the tower to its base. Then they fled as the tower toppled about 1:38 a.m. They left behind two brown paper bags full of tools.

Power was out from Watsonville to Santa Cruz until PG&E was able to reroute it at about 5 a.m., affecting the same 90,000-plus customers who were affected by yesterday's more minor acts of destruction, a spokeswoman said.

This morning, sheriff's deputies and PG&E crews picked their way gingerly around the power lines, looking for fingerprints, footprints, and anything else the rain hadn't washed away.

"Someone spent quite a few

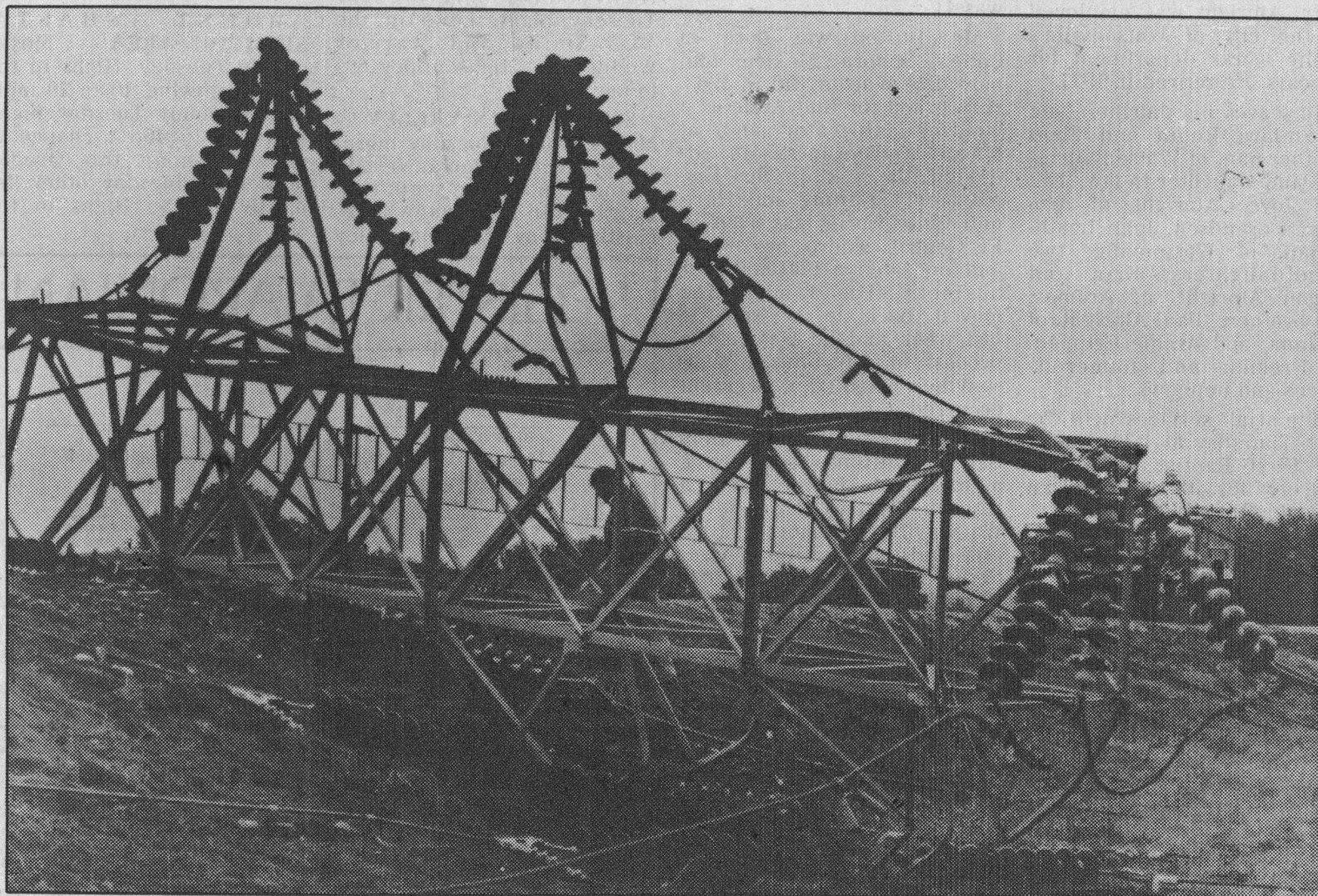
hours doing what he did," Silva said. "He needed to have a lot of strength."

The bolts were hammered flat, he said, so that it wasn't easy to unscrew them.

Silva estimated the damage to the Salsipuedes Creek tower at more than \$150,000, and said it would take at least two weeks to repair. The company will be installing 100-foot wooden poles for the time being, he said.

Neither Watsonville Com-

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Vandals apparently unscrewed the tower's bolts and pushed it over.

Mike McCollum

Group delivers note to news organizations

Three San Francisco news organizations received handwritten notes this morning from a group calling itself Earth Night Action Group, accepting responsibility for at least some of the acts of vandalism that kept Watsonville and other parts of Santa Cruz County in the dark for most of the

night and day.

The note reads in part, "Environmentalists sabotage power lines. April 22, 1990, for immediate release. Earth Night Action Group accepts responsibility for toppling a major PG&E power line ... PG&E corporate absolution through See GROUP page 12

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munity nor Dominican hospitals reported serious problems due to the power outage. PG&E recommended early in the day that businesses send their employees home for the day. Schools stayed open, but allowed parents to pick up their children if they chose to.

Freedom Fire District Chief Ben Evans said firefighters responded to a call at a PG&E substation at Minto Road yesterday morning. He said the arcing flames broke out about 10:30 a.m. when a circuit breaker on a main line shorted out. Pruett of PG&E, however, said as far as he knows that fire was not related to any of the vandalism and apparently did not cause any power outages.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina said the police will increase the number of officers on patrol tonight. Many merchants were concerned about the lack of power, Medina said.

Monterey County was not affected significantly by the power outage. Police and fire officials reported no problems.

GROUP

support of Earth Day is a farce."

The note also called PG&E "hypocritical" for running a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon, near San Luis Obispo, and said if PG&E really had a commitment to environmental issues, "Diablo would be shut down."

The note also said that "ENAG apologizes for the inconvenience," but said that today was a "reprieve we have given the earth."

"In defense of mother earth, we say no thanks to corporate earth rapists like PG&E," the note continued. "Earth Day is every day."

The note also discussed what it said was PG&E's buyout of solar energy producers as a way of keeping solar energy away from the people.

Various other environmental groups contacted today, such as Save Our Shores, said they had not heard of the Earth Night Action Group.