

“They think it’s a minor inconvenience, but it’s a lot more than that.”

Earth Day

‘Eco-terrorists’ cut power

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Group says it caused Santa Cruz area chaos

By Mitchel Benson,
Christopher Pummer
and Lee Quarnstrom
Mercury News Staff Writers

Charging that Sunday’s festive Earth Day celebrations were nothing more than crass commercialism and consumer orgies, radical environmentalists Monday served up a raucous “morning after” menu of vandalism, power outages and protests from Santa Cruz to Wall Street.

Saboteurs calling themselves the Earth Night Action Group took responsibility for toppling high-voltage transmission lines and knock-

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■ A rampage in San Francisco financial district, Page 16A

ing out power to most residents of Santa Cruz County on Sunday and Monday.

And they vowed to continue cutting down wooden power poles and dismantling massive 100-foot steel transmission towers until Pacific Gas & Electric Co. — dubbed a “corporate Earth rapist” by one group spokesman — agrees to shut down its Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

A man who claimed to be a member of the group said in a telephone call Monday to Bay City News Service that the power-line sabotage was “just the beginning.” He said about a dozen people were responsible for the mayhem so far.

At the same time, other activists attempted to close down the Pacific Stock Exchange in San Francisco and the New York Stock Exchange to expose what they said was the duplicity and shallowness of corporate America’s newfound environmental awareness.

Police arrested 204 people in New York and 49 protesters in San Francisco. The radical environmentalists who participated in and supported the stock exchange protests said they had no connection to

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Thomas Van Dyke — Mercury News

Jean Caiani debates an unidentified man during a protest at San Francisco’s Pacific Stock Exchange



A 100-foot transmission tower was toppled by vandals early Monday east of Watsonville on a levee along the Pajaro River. Radical environmentalists said it was an attack on Pacific Gas & Electric Co.’s environmental record. Crews still were working late Monday to restore power to the last of the areas affected.

Richard Wisdom — Mercury News

Earth First! denies power-line sabotage

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the Earth Night Action Group.

"None of us had any idea who did it, but whoever did it is a hero," said Judi Bari of Ukiah Earth First! "PG&E's participation in Earth Day is particularly odious. ... They are operating a nuclear plant on an earthquake-fault that would kill hundreds of thousands of people."

PG&E spokesman Tony Ledwell defended the utility: "We think that PG&E has one of the better environmental records and we think it's getting better every day. There's room to continue the debate, but criminal activity is no way to end that debate."

Earth First! supporters, using posters and fliers, had promoted an anti-Earth Day protest they called Earth Night 1990. The slogan: "Go out and do something for the Earth at night."

But Bari insisted the slogan was "tongue in cheek — typical Earth First! humor."

The FBI was called in to investigate Sunday's and Monday's power outages, but neither PG&E nor federal agents could establish any links between the still-mysterious Earth Night Action Group and Earth First!.

PG&E offered a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the people responsible for the vandalism.

Electricity for 92,000 Santa Cruz County customers was out for almost two hours Sunday after utility crews accidentally ignited a small fire. The fire broke out as the crews repaired a high-voltage wooden power pole near Watsonville that was cut by the vandals, PG&E spokesman Ron Rutkowski said. The outage began at 10:45 a.m. and power was restored at 12:38 p.m.

Crews late Sunday afternoon found another damaged transmission pole in the same general vicinity. It was cut completely through, but there was no power interruption.

Same area hit again

A second outage began at 1:38 a.m. Monday, affecting roughly the same area and number of customers. Crews found a 100-foot steel transmission tower at Watsonville that had crashed to the ground after someone chiseled loose one-inch-thick bolts on all four legs at the base. Power was restored to all customers by 5:25 a.m.

Law enforcement authorities and PG&E crews were still trying to determine Monday afternoon whether a third outage could be connected to the vandalism. Power in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties to an estimated 95,000 customers went out at 8:55 a.m. Monday when a 115,000-volt power line came down near Morgan Hill.

PG&E received reports that the line was shot down with a rifle or shotgun. "The absolute bottom line right now is we don't know. We have no proof to connect it to vandalism," said PG&E's Ledwell.

By midafternoon, PG&E had restored power to 42,000 customers in the cities of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley; there were still

A county powerless

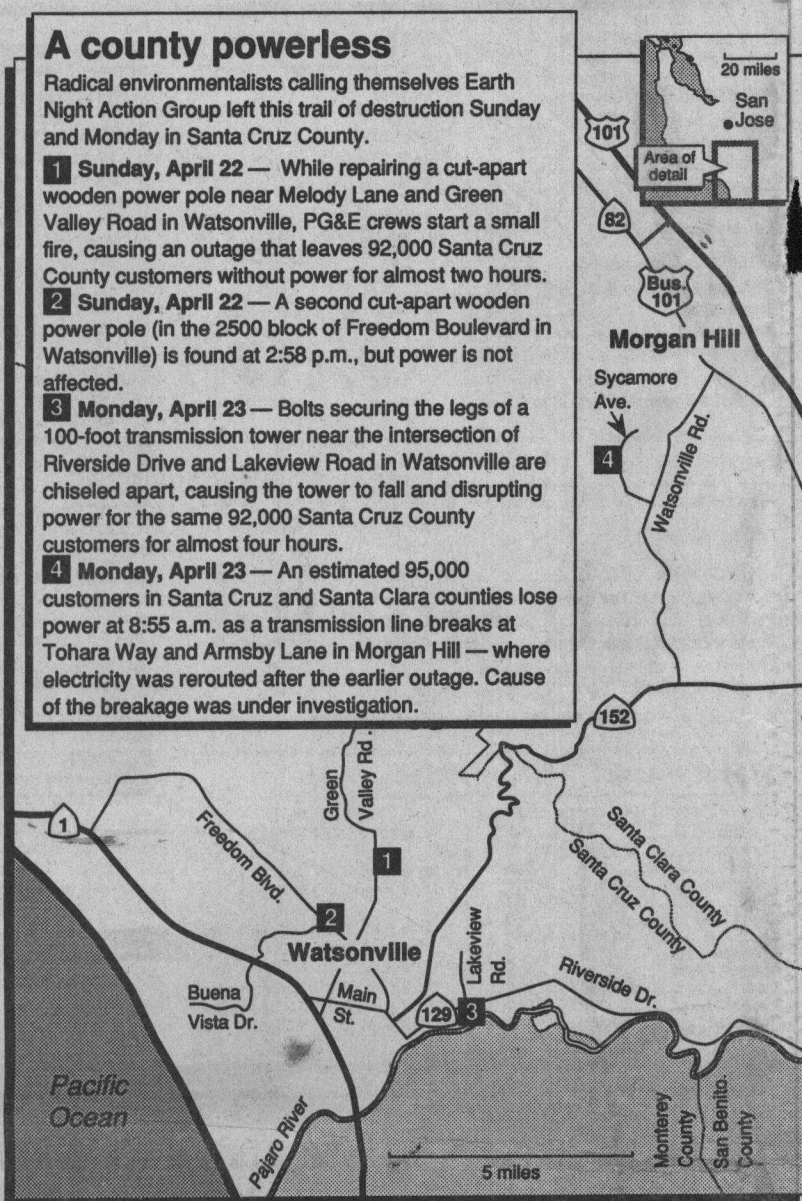
Radical environmentalists calling themselves Earth Night Action Group left this trail of destruction Sunday and Monday in Santa Cruz County.

1 Sunday, April 22 — While repairing a cut-apart wooden power pole near Melody Lane and Green Valley Road in Watsonville, PG&E crews start a small fire, causing an outage that leaves 92,000 Santa Cruz County customers without power for almost two hours.

2 Sunday, April 22 — A second cut-apart wooden power pole (in the 2500 block of Freedom Boulevard in Watsonville) is found at 2:58 p.m., but power is not affected.

3 Monday, April 23 — Bolts securing the legs of a 100-foot transmission tower near the intersection of Riverside Drive and Lakeview Road in Watsonville are chiseled apart, causing the tower to fall and disrupting power for the same 92,000 Santa Cruz County customers for almost four hours.

4 Monday, April 23 — An estimated 95,000 customers in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties lose power at 8:55 a.m. as a transmission line breaks at Tohara Way and Armsby Lane in Morgan Hill — where electricity was rerouted after the earlier outage. Cause of the breakage was under investigation.



Reported by Maggie Hirsch — Mercury News

53,000 customers without power, primarily in Watsonville, Freedom and Aptos.

By 10 p.m., power was restored to most of the county, but police in Watsonville said several rural areas still had not been reconnected.

Businesses large and small were thrown into chaos.

Lauren MacDonell, owner of the Santa Cruz Zoo pet shop on Soquel Avenue, said a newly hatched bird — a blue-head pionus valued at \$900 when full-grown — died because there was no power for its incubator.

MacDonell said she breeds and raises rare birds to lessen the need to trap and take them away from their native countries.

"Now I'm struggling to save a bare-eyed cockatoo that's 10 days old," MacDonell said. "I don't know if they know how this affects us. We're trying to save these birds. They think it's a minor inconvenience, but it's a lot more than that."

Borland International, a Scotts Valley software producer, let half its 450 employees go home by 2 p.m. Manufacturing workers at Lipton's Santa Cruz plant were re-assigned to packaging and shipping chores during the eight hours the outages halted soup and tea production.

Banks affected

Banks whose computer and security systems went down were

reduced to manual transactions and took exceptional security precautions.

"We kept our door locked and let customers in on a case-by-case basis," said Juleen Lisher, manager of California Savings and Loan in Santa Cruz, where power was out until 2:30 p.m.

At the University of California, Santa Cruz, many classes were dismissed, offices were closed and computer operations were disrupted. "Valuable research materials may have been lost," said Bruce Moore, vice chancellor for student services.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina said Monday afternoon his department was doubling its regular nighttime patrols to prevent looting.

A hand-printed message delivered to Bay City, the Associated Press and the San Francisco Examiner apologized to people affected by the vandalism and asked for understanding of the deeds.

But other environmental groups questioned both the tactics and the target of the sabotage.

"A couple of macho crazies with chain saws and guns can ruin much more than a power pole. They can set back the very movement they claim to represent," said Dan Haifley, project coordinator for Save Our Shores, a Santa Cruz-based group.