

PG&E to lay off 35 in S.C. County

Thirty-five Santa Cruz County employees of Pacific Gas and Electric will lose their jobs in the next 11 months in the latest round of layoffs announced yesterday afternoon by the utility.

PG&E also said it will begin notifying some 1,300 union employees throughout northern and central California next week that their jobs are being eliminated. Because some employees will be able to transfer into other positions in the company, the net loss will be approximately 850 jobs.

Nearly all of the jobs being eliminated are in the construction crews in the company's 18 geographic divisions.

Bob Storm, PG&E Santa Cruz District Manager, said last night that the electric department will be cut from 39 people to 19 and the gas department from 24 to 12.

Another 38 workers in Monterey

and San Benito counties will be laid off, Storm said.

All of the positions, he said, are in the construction fields.

The utility said it doesn't need as many people in its field construction forces as it did a couple of decades ago because not as many homes and businesses are being built in its service area.

PG&E said last night that since the 1980s, the number of new electric customers connecting to PG&E has dropped by more than 60 percent, from an average of 85,000 to 33,000 annually, and the number of new gas connections has dropped by more than 70 percent, from an annual average of 70,000 to fewer than 20,000 in 1994.

The Santa Cruz District, which covers all of Santa Cruz County, will also lose an electric trouble man and possibly two gas servicemen, Storm said.

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The down sizing, which has been sharply criticized over the last couple of months — first by union leaders and then during the last month by customers who think the smaller work force led to delays in restoring power during

the January storms, is part of PG&E's overall plan to resize its work force to reflect the fact that there is less work, Storm said.

The work force reductions, Storm said, shouldn't affect the company's response in emergency conditions.

"We are talking about the people who build electric and gas lines," Storm said.

"The reason the power was out (in the Santa Cruz Mountains during the January storms) was not a function of the number of crews.

"We brought in 60 crews to respond to the storm initially and then kept bringing them.

"We are not reducing our work force to the point that we can't respond to a customer's need and provide quality service."