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1407 PCB cleanup nearly complete

Cleanup of a spill of PCB-contaminated mineral oil from a blown Pacific Gas and Electric Co. electrical transformer on Linda Mar Boulevard is nearly complete, with PG&E claims adjusters moving in to follow up on the damage.

The oil showered down at 12:35 p.m. Tuesday after a 12,000-kilovolt transformer overheated and exploded with what a neighbor said was the sound of several large pieces of fireworks going off at once.

The polychlorinated biphenyl, believed to be highly toxic to humans, got on the yard of the William Sugrue Jr. home at 1559 Linda Mar, the car of Stephen Foster, 1560 Linda Mar, and the pavement.

The Foster car still needed some cleaning around the rubber window seals, but otherwise the cleanup went well, according to PG&E spokeswoman Faith Kramer. Chemical analysis Wednesday afternoon showed less than 50 parts of PCB per million remaining in the contaminated area,

a level considered safe for people, she said.

Foster, however, said he was through with that car, a 1970 Ford. "I'm not going to touch it," he said Thursday.

The 21-year-old mechanic said it appeared the car also needed to be cleaned in some hard-to-reach places like the hood cowl and under chrome strips where the PCB had penetrated. He had bought the vehi-

This incident would not have happened at all had PG&E personnel responded promptly to the first alert of trouble, according to Mrs. Jean Foster, Stephen's mother.

Mrs. Foster said she called PG&E at 11:20 a.m. Tuesday when she saw smoke coming from the transformer, but that no one showed up until 12:35 p.m.

The PG&E troubleshooter arrived just in time to see it explode and spill the PCB-laced oil, according to Ms. Kramer.

"I was told by a district manager

that if there had been a shorter response time this would not have happened," Mrs. Foster said. She also noted that PG&E people had told her the electrical circuits to the transformer would have been turned off and what she described as "arcing, popping and puffing" could have been avoided.

The transformer explosion, though not terribly loud, "sounded about like four M-80s (a type of fireworks) going off at once," Mrs. Foster recounted. The cloud of smoke completely enveloped the Sugrue home and partially covered the one next to it, she said.

Ms. Kramer said there had been some trouble with radios in the field vehicles that day, which could have delayed the response, but could offer no explanation of what the trouble had been.

PG&E spokeswoman Susanne Coffey said Thursday the utility pole itself would be replaced later this week. Some of the yard sod at the Sugrue home also is being removed, she said.

There had been no PCB intentionally added to the mineral oil in the transformer, Ms. Coffey said, but had gotten into the transformer when it was built when the mineral oil was added through pipes which also had been used to add PCB to capacitors. "This procedure is no longer used," she said.