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Allen's P. C. B Est. 1888

PCB transformer explodes

PACIFICA — A 12,000-volt power transformer belonging to Pacific Gas and Electric Co. ruptured Tuesday in Pacifica, releasing black smoke as well as the suspected carcinogen polychlorinated biphenyls, according to a PG&E spokeswoman.

Roberta Palm of PG&E said the spill occurred about 12:30 p.m. when a transformer atop a power pole in the 1500 block of Linda Mar Boulevard exploded.

Jean Foster, a resident on Linda Mar, said she called PG&E at about 11:20 a.m., when the elevated transformer started "arcing and puffing and smoking."

Foster said it took a little more than an hour for PG&E to respond to her call. A utility inspector arrived at 12:30 p.m., just in time for the final explosion, which Foster said released so much smoke that it "completely obliterated my vision" of houses across the street.

PG&E crews immediately cordoned off the area and began removing the transformer, according to Palm. Crews are performing mop-up operations, Palm said, including excavating a 12-foot square section of soil in front of Foster's home to a depth of four inches, to rid the area of the chemical.

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PCB cleanup continues on Linda Mar in Pacifica

By DAVE MADDEN
Times Staff Writer

PACIFICA — Cleanup of a spill of PCB-contaminated mineral oil from a blown PG&E electrical transformer on Linda Mar Boulevard was nearly complete today, with a PG&E claims adjustor 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 con-

sidered 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 car recently with the idea of fixing it up and reselling it, but that idea appears to be dead now, he said, adding that he was expecting a PG&E adjustor sometime this week to visit and make an offer for the car.

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., just in time to see it explode and spill the PCB.

Ms. Kramer said there had been some trouble with radios in the field

vehicles that day, which could have delayed the response.

PG&E spokeswoman Susanne Coffey said today 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.

The PG&E replacement program of PCB apparatus is for its capacitors, small boxes about the size of an attache case on the poles which store energy and for which PCB once was considered the best coolant, she explained.

The transformer is a larger, barrel-shaped device used to transform the high voltage from the main line to lower voltages for household and business use.

These are supposed to have no PCB at all in them, Ms. Coffey said.