

# THE UNION



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Wednesday, September 9, 2020

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Smoke from the Bear Fire/North Complex wildfire burning in Plumas County, visible from Grass Valley, serves as an ominous reminder to be fire safe and have a "go-bag" ready if called to evacuate.

## Power shut-offs hit thousands in county

Restoration expected by tonight

By Elias Funez  
Multimedia Reporter

A widespread Public Safety Power Shut-off affected 172,000 PG&E customers across 22 Northern California counties Monday and Tuesday while an offshore wind event fanned the flames of fires such as the Creek Fire, and the Bear Fire/North Complex fire that sent thick plumes of smoke over Grass Valley from Plumas County.

Nevada County had 23,312 customers affected, including 1,225 medical baseline customers, in Grass Valley, Nevada City and unincorporated areas.

PG&E officials are expected to begin inspecting power lines for damage today, and begin reenergizing customers with the hopes of having everyone's power restored by 9 p.m. tonight.

"We have to wait for the weather authorization," PG&E spokesperson Brandi Merlo said Tuesday. "We are expecting it sometime between tonight and tomorrow morning. At that point we will begin our patrol and with the goal of everyone restored by tomorrow evening and tomorrow night."

Bolstered temporary generation stations set up at PG&E's Brunswick and Grass Valley substations have helped ensure that the lights



A temporary power generation station set up at PG&E's Brunswick Substation uses diesel-powered generators the size of 10 shipping containers. Power from the Brunswick and downtown Grass Valley substations are keeping the population cores of Grass Valley and Nevada City energized with power during the Public Safety Power Shut-off.

can be kept on around Grass Valley and Nevada City's population centers.

Ten cargo container-sized diesel powered mobile generators were put online at the Brunswick station about 2 a.m. Tuesday morning, helping to energize the Glenbrook Basin and downtown Nevada City.

"That was something that we did last year for Main Street and the hospital," Merlo said. "This year we were able to expand it a little further."

A PG&E community resource center will be established again today for people impacted by the PSPS.

Those wishing to power up their devices and use Wi-Fi can show up to the Nevada City Elks Lodge, 518 Highway 49, between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m.

"The smoke if nothing else created a lot of alarm for people and it's a really good warning on these Red Flag



Nevada City's Jasmine Friedman utilizes the PG&E community resource center located in the parking lot of the Nevada City Elks Lodge, during Tuesday's Public Safety Power Shut-offs.

Days to be prepared not just for power outages but for fire events," Nevada County Public Information Officer Taylor Wolfe said.

Wolfe, who expands her services with the county to help during emergencies, said that many other county officials are also better equipped to respond during incidents.

"Both our community

business partners and county partners are more prepared than the first time we went through this last year," Wolfe said of the power shut-offs. "We have more training, more bandwidth with staff this year."

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### NEVADA CITY

## Council preps for pushback

By John Orona  
Staff Writer

The Nevada City Council this evening will weigh its options for pushing back against PG&E's plan to remove around 250 trees that could be a danger to reenergizing during Public Safety Power Shut-off events.

The council meets remotely at 6:30 p.m. today.

According to PG&E representative JoAnne Drummond, the company has a legal mandate to remove trees it deems hazardous, even without approval from the City Council — but the city has not confirmed that opinion.

Nevada City Planner Amy Wolfson during its Sept. 1 meeting told the Planning Commission that PG&E had a mandate to remove trees it deemed dangerous. However, Nevada City Attorney Crissy Hodgson said she could

### HOW TO WATCH

Visit [www.nevadacityca.gov](http://www.nevadacityca.gov) or the city's YouTube channel by searching: "Nevada City public meetings"

not say whether PG&E actually had the authority to remove the trees without approval from the council, but suggested previously there may be alternatives.

"The issue is looking like it's going to be less that we don't have an option, but that we assume liability and the insurance company needs to weigh in," Hodgson said at the last council meeting. "It's looking like it's coming down to assumption of liability: either PG&E does their work or we assume liability."

The council will review a list of about 20 trees that an arborist will examine to determine if there are alternatives to cutting

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Flames burn at a home leveled by the Creek Fire along Highway 168 on Tuesday in Fresno County.

## Helicopters pull more people from burning forest

By Marcio Jose Sanchez and Christopher Weber  
Associated Press

SHAVER LAKE, Calif. — Helicopters flew through dense smoke Tuesday to rescue scores more people from wildfires as wind-fanned flames kept chewing through bone-dry California after a scorching Labor Day weekend that saw a dramatic airlift of more than 200.

Rescue choppers pulled another 164 people from the Sierra National Forest through the morning and were working to rescue 17 others, said Gov. Gavin Newsom, who described pilots wearing night-vision

goggles to find a place to land.

"It's where training meets the moment, but it always takes the courage, the conviction and the grit of real people doing real work," Newsom said.

California has already set a record with nearly 2.3 million acres burned this year, and the worst part of the wildfire season is just beginning.

"This is historic," Newsom said in a briefing from Sacramento.

The previous acreage record was set just two years ago and included the deadliest wildfire in

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### OBITUARIES

Glenn Frazier, Richard Alderman, Nancy Lee McGowan, Thomas Philip Sheehan, Joy Hokanson, Dave Barnett (Memoriam)

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### WEATHER



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Sunny

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### IN BRIEF

**COVID-19 cases reach 463**  
Total coronavirus cases for Nevada County reached 463 on Tuesday, a rise of seven from last week.  
Western county had 276 cases, and eastern county had 187. There were 66 active cases on Tuesday, an increase of one from last

Friday. There have been 392 recoveries, and five deaths. Cases have continued to climb in the county. There were 357 on Aug. 11. By Aug. 18 they had grown to 392, and hit 424 by Aug. 25. They'd reached 449 on Sept. 1.  
Two people were

hospitalized locally Tuesday with COVID-19.

Of the 17,969 tests performed locally, 2.6% of people have tested positive.

Nationwide, there were 6,287,362 total cases, and 188,688 deaths, the CDC states.

— The Union staff

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## NATION &amp; FROM PAGE ONE

# GOP proposes 'targeted' virus aid, but Dems say not enough

By Andrew Taylor  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate prepared to vote this week on a trimmed-down Republican coronavirus relief package, though it only has a slim chance of passage in the face of Democrats' insistence for more sweeping aid.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell released the approximately \$500 billion measure on Tuesday as senators returned to Washington for an abbreviated pre-election session, but hopes were dimming for another coronavirus relief bill — or much else.

Republicans struggling to retain their Senate majority this fall have been divided, with some GOP senators in close races anxious to respond further to the pandemic, even as conservatives are tiring of all the spending and passing legislation in concert with liberal House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

McConnell called the package "a targeted proposal that focuses on several of the most urgent aspects of this crisis, the issues where bipartisanship should be especially possible." They included school aid, new money for vaccines and testing, and a second round of the popular Paycheck Protection Program for smaller businesses.

Democrats demanded a far larger bill, including hundreds of billions of dollars for state and local governments, more generous jobless benefits, and help for renters and homeowners, along with other provisions in the House Democrats' \$3.5 billion relief bill that passed in May.

"Get real, Mitch McConnell," Pelosi said during a Bloomberg interview. "It's only a 'check the box' so that some of his endangered Republican senators can go home and say, 'Well, see, I tried.' But it isn't trying. It is not even an attempt to do the right thing."

Republican senators such as Susan Collins of Maine are eager to show constituents they are continuing to work to ease the pandemic's disastrous impact on jobs, businesses and health. But many Senate Republicans are resisting more spending, and the scaled-back bill is roughly half the size of a measure McConnell unveiled earlier this summer.

McConnell's move Tuesday would clear the way for a Thursday test vote in which Democrats were sure to block the legislation. Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a statement that the bill "doesn't come close to addressing the problems and is headed nowhere."

## Computer glitches disrupt classes as schools return online

By Adriana Gomez Licon and Michael Kunzelman  
Associated Press

MIAMI — As millions of American youngsters start the school year with online classes at home because of the coronavirus, they are running into technical glitches and other headaches that have thrust many a harried parent into the role of teacher's aide and tech support person.

A ransomware attack forced schools in Hartford, Connecticut, to postpone the start of online and in-person classes this week. Seattle's system crashed last week, and a Zoom outage caused it to shut down for more than two hours in August. An online learning program used in Alabama and other places recently crashed. North Carolina's platform went down on the first day of classes last month.

Erik Rasmussen, a Falls Church, Virginia, resident who has three children taking online classes and

a fourth in college, said he regularly copes with computer glitches and short attention spans. The divorced dad has his children half the time.

"You put your kids in front of the computer, and then I go to do my work, but kids are kids -- they're going to turn off the video function and start playing a game," he said.

Summer break gave school districts time to iron out kinks that cropped up when the virus forced them to switch to online classes in the spring. But the new school year already has been plagued by some of the same problems.

Florida's largest school district, in Miami-Dade County, had assured parents that it had consolidated different programs into one platform that would be easier to navigate. But software glitches and cyberattacks disrupted the first week of the new school year that started Aug. 31.

## WILDFIRES

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state history, which swept through the community of Paradise and killed 85 people.

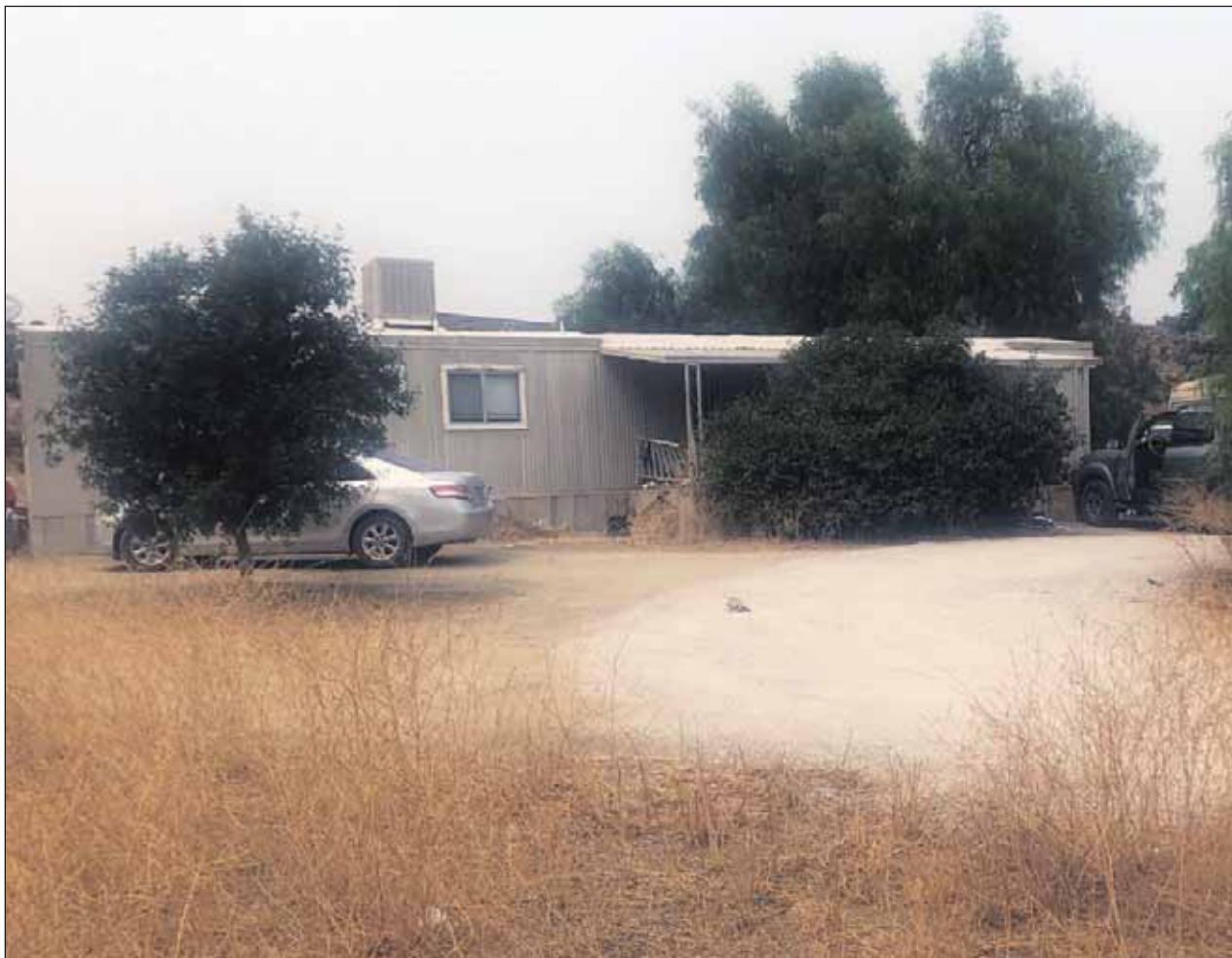
That 2018 blaze was started by power lines amid strong winds and tinder-dry conditions. Liability from billions of dollars in claims from that and other fires forced the state's largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, to seek bankruptcy protection. To guard against new disasters, the company last year began preemptive power shutoffs when fire conditions are exceptionally dangerous.

That's the situation now

in Northern California, where high and dry winds are expected until today. PG&E said it has learned from past problems and will seek this year to make the outages "smaller in size, shorter in length and smarter for customers."

Over the weekend, the company cut power to 172,000 customers — including those in Nevada County — to try to prevent more blazes.

More than 14,000 firefighters are battling more than two dozen fires around the state. Two of the three largest blazes in state history are burning in the San Francisco Bay Area.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

A car is left parked at a house where killings occurred in the rural town Aguanga, Calif. Seven people were found fatally shot at an illegal marijuana growing operation in Aguanga. The crime scene was discovered before dawn Monday after deputies responded to a report of an assault with a deadly weapon at a home in the unincorporated community of Aguanga, north of San Diego, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department said in a statement.

# 7 killings investigated at illegal pot grow in SoCal

By Elliot Spagat and Michael R. Blood  
Associated Press

AGUANGA, Calif. — Detectives on Tuesday investigated what prompted the Labor Day killings of seven people at an illegal marijuana growing operation in a small, rural Southern California community known for its horse ranches and nurseries along dirt roads.

The fatal shootings in Aguanga, north of San Diego, represent the latest flashpoint in the violence that often permeates California's illegal marijuana market.

The state broadly legalized recreational marijuana sales in January 2018

but the illicit market is thriving — in part because hefty legal marijuana taxes send consumers looking for better deals in the illegal economy.

Before dawn Monday, Riverside County sheriff's deputies responded to a report of an assault with a deadly weapon at an Aguanga home. They found a woman suffering from gunshot wounds who later died at a hospital, according to a sheriff's department statement.

The deputies also discovered six more dead people at the house that "was being used to manufacture and harvest an illicit marijuana operation," the statement said.

Investigators seized

more than 1,000 pounds of marijuana and several hundred marijuana plants.

While officials said they did not immediately find any suspects, the sheriff's statement called the deaths "an isolated incident" that did not threaten people in Aguanga, population about 2,000.

"The area is safe and we don't have any other concerns," sheriff's Sgt. Deanna Pecoraro said.

Partially eaten pizza sat in boxes on the ground in a circular dirt driveway of the dilapidated two-bedroom house where the shootings occurred. Three cars with California or Nevada license plates were parked outside, including a Toyota Sequoia with its

front doors open.

Cases of bottled water were stacked on the front porch, and clothing and plastic bags were strewn about. A black tarp was stretched atop poles in the fenced backyard, indicating a small growing operation.

A wooden sign with the property's address at the foot of a long driveway had a strand of yellow police tape tied to it. Unlike many neighboring homes, it had no gate at the entrance or trespassing signs.

The sheriff's department declined to give additional details about the case, but officials planned to hold a news conference in the afternoon.

## Trump, Biden and the road to 270 electoral votes

By Steve Peoples, Kathleen Hennessey, and Jill Colvin  
Associated Press

WAYZATA, Minn. — For such a volatile year, the White House race between President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden has been remarkably consistent.

With Election Day just eight weeks away, Biden is maintaining the same comfortable lead in most national polls that he enjoyed through the summer. He also has an advantage, though narrower, in many of the battleground states that will decide the election. Trump remains in striking distance, banking on the

intensity of his most loyal supporters and the hope that disillusioned Republicans ultimately swing his way.

Still, both parties are braced for the prospect of sudden changes ahead, particularly as Trump makes an aggressive pitch to white suburban voters focused on safety and fear of violent unrest. It's unclear how well his rhetoric will resonate, but Democrats insist it can't be ignored, especially in the upper Midwest.

That's especially true in Minnesota, a state that hasn't voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1972. Democrats there say they're increasingly concerned that the

state is genuinely in play this year.

"Trump can win Minnesota," said Rep. Dean Phillips, who in 2018 became the first Democrat to win his suburban Minneapolis district since 1960. "It's real. It's absolutely real."

While Trump's campaign is touting a play for Minnesota as a way to expand the electoral map, the president is playing defense in a host of the other battleground states he needs in order to secure the 270 Electoral College votes to keep the White House. Biden's campaign is laser-focused on the states in the Midwest and close by that Trump flipped in 2016 — Michigan, Wisconsin

and Pennsylvania — and also making a robust play for Arizona, a state that hasn't backed a Democratic presidential candidate since 1996.

Biden is also redoubling his focus on Florida, the biggest prize among the perennial battlegrounds and a state that would virtually block Trump's reelection if it swings Democratic. Biden's allies hoped the devastating toll of the pandemic would put them in a strong position there, but a poll released on Tuesday found voters were closely divided. Kamala Harris, Biden's running mate, will make the campaign's first in-person appearance in Florida on Thursday.

## PG&E

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them down. About 100 of the 250 trees are on city property while the remaining are on private property.

Despite the fact the mitigation has not been completed, parts of downtown Nevada City and the 7 Hills district were still reenergized Tuesday.

The city during today's meeting could ask PG&E to work with it to develop an undergrounding plan, reconsider the trees they identified, and to work with the city on a mitigation plan.

Drummond said she should would field requests like mitigation funding, but reiterated that legal counsel

determined it has no obligation to entertain them.

"I am not confident (about the requests) as it sets a dangerous precedent that any time we seek to remove a tree under the law as our moral duty and obligation that we would be paying you for it," Drummond said. "That is a contrary concept to the legal authority and moral duty that these are hazard trees and therefore have no value."

Nevada City Councilman Doug Fleming said the council is exploring multiple options for dealing with the company, including looking into whether other jurisdictions have had success challenging PG&E and what a successful challenge

might mean for Nevada City.

"We've heard that other jurisdictions have been successful in challenging them. We don't know what success means exactly," Fleming said. "The citizens have spoken and they really, really care about this issue. It's really important to the public, and rightfully so, but we have to strike a balance between what the public wants in saving the trees and working with PG&E to get a good outcome."

Nevada City resident Kathy Dodson said she agreed to allow PG&E contractors to remove about seven trees on her property, but now regrets it.

"I felt kind of compelled

for the safety of our street and our property that I had to sign the paperwork. Now I'm having second thoughts," Dodson said. "It's going to change the landscape of my own property but also of our small neighborhood here and the entire community."

Dodson said she wants the city to push for alternatives like undergrounding.

"I feel like I'm being kind of held hostage, you know besides the fact that we have no power," she said. "I feel like my rights as a property owner have been cut down."

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