

Dear Mr. Nauman

We are writing to you to support our neighbors in the Montclair area of Oakland, who have been petitioning you to revise your timetable for undergrounding utilities and include Montclair in the immediate future.

The San Francisco Chronicle (June 22, 2023, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/california-wildfires/article/oakland-montclair-pge-fire-18148842.php>) notes that PG&E spokesman Matt Nauman said PG&E “*plans to incorporate ingress and egress into an updated risk model this year*” (italics added). We urge the utility to incorporate these factors at once and revise the plan after doing so. The risk in Montclair is too great to allow this neighborhood to be put on the back burner.

Our neighborhood was the scene of the 1991 Tunnel Fire, in which 25 people lost their lives. Most of these deaths occurred because of blocked or inadequate evacuation routes. The twisting, steep streets of the Montclair hills are, if anything, narrower, more congested, and simply more dangerous than ours in the North Hills. Despite the best efforts of City and residents, there is a tremendous fuel load in the Montclair region. PG&E *must* factor in the dreadful risk of death in that area due to the topography and lack of good evacuation routes. Emergency crews entering the area and residents fleeing will comprise a deadly combination. We must do everything possible to prevent Montclair from becoming the scene of the type of disaster we in the North Hills experienced in 1991.

If a fire breaks out in a remote region of the Sierra because of a downed power line, it is of course extremely dangerous for the health of the whole region, and loss of life has clearly been the direct result of such catastrophic failures in the past few years. No one would downplay the need for safety upgrades there. But if a wildfire broke out in Shepherd Canyon in Montclair, it would immediately put thousands of lives at risk.

We urge PG&E to expedite the undergrounding of utilities in our sister neighborhood to the south; we urge the City of Oakland to work with PG&E to make this happen.

Sincerely,

David Kessler
Vice-Chair, North Hills Community Association