

California firm to bury 10,000 miles of power lines to stop wildfires

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Pacific Gas & Electric has begun switching off power in California, in a bid to prevent catastrophic infernos.

California's largest energy utility firm will bury 10,000 miles of power lines in a massive bid to prevent its equipment igniting more deadly

wildfires, its CEO said Wednesday.

Pacific Gas and Electric's faulty power lines sparked the deadliest blaze in the state's [modern history](#), which swept through the northern Californian town of Paradise in 2018, killing 86 people.

PG&E equipment was again blamed this week for one of the largest fires now blazing in California—the Dixie Fire—after a tree fell on a power conductor on the day the blaze began.

Announcing the measure, CEO Patti Poppe said the decision to bury the lines had been brought forward due to the "emotional toll" of the Dixie Fire, which is burning in the wildfire scars of the Paradise blaze.

"We are committing today to undertake one of the largest infrastructure projects in the history of our state," said Poppe at a press conference.

"We are committing to bury 10,000 miles of lines, starting in our highest fire threat districts and our highest risk areas. We start today."

The project is expected to take a decade and cost tens of billions of dollars. California utilities have buried power lines before, but never approaching this scale.

Uncleared land around high-voltage lines has been blamed for triggering many of the massive fires that have swept California in recent years, although a significant part of last year's record fire season was triggered by lightning strikes.

In recent years, utility firms have taken to organizing pre-emptive blackouts during hot, windy conditions to prevent the spread of wildfire.

But Governor Gavin Newsom slammed the "scale and scope" of the

unpopular measure in 2019, instead blaming decades of "neglect" and "mismanagement" by PG&E.

PG&E acknowledged its equipment was to blame for the Paradise disaster and filed for [bankruptcy protection](#) in January 2019.

It reached a deal with regulators to pay for wildfire-related costs, as well as forest firefighting measures and the upkeep of electrical equipment blamed for causing several fatal blazes.

The utility giant last year reached a separate plea agreement with local prosecutors over the Paradise [fire](#), admitting 84 counts of manslaughter and one count of unlawful arson.

More than 300,000 acres have burned in California so far this year—far ahead of the same period in 2020, itself the worst year in modern state history for wildfire destruction.

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