

# PG&E hires engineering firm to probe Fresno blast

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<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/PG-E-hires-engineering-firm-to-probe-Fresno-blast-6210042.php>

**SFGATE**

Updated 7:20 pm, Sunday, April 19, 2015

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Photo: Courtesy Of PG & E, Pacific Gas And Electric

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Handout photo dated April 17, 2015 of the blast site at Fresno County Sheriffs firing range at 7633 North Weber Ave. PG&E officials, who provided the photo, say it shows a sign (left, center) warning of the presence of an underground natural gas line. At the center of the photo is the burned out front-end loader that triggered the explosion. At right is an exposed part of the gas pipeline.

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Handout photo dated April 17, 2015 of the blast site at Fresno County Sheriffs firing range at 7633 North Weber Ave. PG&E officials, who provided the photo, say it shows a sign (left, center) warning of the presence of an underground natural gas line. At the center of the photo is the burned out front-end loader that triggered the explosion. At right is an exposed part of the gas pipeline.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. has hired an independent engineering firm to determine the cause of a natural gas pipeline explosion that injured 12 people in Fresno, company officials said Sunday.

Engineers from Exponent, a consulting firm known for its work in analyzing failures, have been sent to the site of Friday's fiery explosion in northwest Fresno to conduct a metallurgical analysis of what remains of the pipeline. They'll join county officials and investigators from the [California Public Utilities Commission](#) and the federal [Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration](#) in trying to figure out how and why the explosion happened.

Six of the 12 people injured in the explosion remained hospitalized Sunday, including one in critical condition, said [Mary Lisa Russell](#), a spokeswoman for [Community Regional Medical Center](#).

Among the issues investigators will consider are whether construction crews building berms on the site — used by the Sheriff's Department as a firing range — had significantly altered the site by scraping away feet of dirt covering the pipeline.

Crews using a front-end loader to move dirt on the site struck the pipeline on Friday, puncturing the 12-inch gas pipeline and sending a ball of fire more than 100 feet into the sky, according to witnesses.

While investigators delve into the incident, PG&E officials said an aerial investigation conducted the day before the explosion showed no construction activity on the site and indicated no gas leaks from the pipeline. An inspection on foot on April 1 also found no signs of gas escaping into the air, said [Greg Snapper](#), a PG&E spokesman.

State law requires workers using excavation or earth-moving equipment to call 811, a call center that sends out crews to identify the location of underground pipes, two days before construction. PG&E officials say no such call was made. The Fresno Bee reported Sunday that a Fresno County public works official had expected the driver of the front-end loader would be working in another area.

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