

1956 Pipeline Test Caused San Bruno Blast

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Pacific Gas & Electric Co. told California regulators this week that a pipeline test the company performed in 1956 damaged a weld and led to the 2010 deadly explosion in San Bruno.

PG&E made the claim in a filing submitted Tuesday to the California Public Utilities Commission, which has launched numerous investigations into the company that could result in millions in fines in the wake of the blast on Sept. 9, 2010. The explosion sparked a gas-fueled inferno that left eight people dead and destroyed dozens of homes.

Commission staff previously has said that the company broke federal pipeline safety rules by failing to perform a pipeline strength test. They also spelled out numerous other problems at the company in various proceedings, emphasizing poor record keeping, inadequate emergency response and a culture that "emphasized profits over safety."

The company based its assertion that the pipe was tested on an interview with a former employee, and challenged regulators' claims that the company had systemic problems.

"They create the false impression of an organization in which no one ever did anything right," the filing said.

According to the company, the employee said he observed a pressure test being performed on the transmission line that ran through the San Bruno neighborhood near the location of the rupture, right around the time the pipeline was installed.

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