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Record of Conversation
Geoff Lesh, P.E.
Siting, Transmission and Environmental Protection Division
California Energy Commission

June 21, 2011

On June 21, 2011, I spoke by phone with Battalion Chief John Tenger, Battalion Chief, 'C' division, of the City of Escondido Fire Department, to get an understanding of the chronology of the events that led to the eventual extinguishment of the transformer fire at the Palomar Power Station (01-AFC-24C) that occurred on Dec 22, 2010, and to ascertain whether there were lessons to be learned that could be applied to siting of future power plants. The following is a summary of our conversation.

Chief Tenger was with the first-on-scene company that responded to the fire call, and was the incident commander for the first day until being relieved the next morning.

Upon arrival:

- Team viewed fire situation on video monitor in the control room, and was briefed by on-site management personnel.
- Because of the potential presence of energized high voltage lines in the area where the fire would be fought, and the danger they would pose with water and water-based foam to be used to fight the fire, the team verified that Lock-Out/Tag-Out was in place and completed so that power was off in area of fire. He noted that smoke plumes are conductive and can pose a shock hazard in the presence of high voltages.
- He called for county health and county hazmat units to respond to evaluate the situation because of the presence of burning oil and its smoke plume. The county health team determined that air quality was not a significant hazard to the public.
- There was a question of whether there was sufficient berm height, because the team did not know how much oil remained in the leaking transformer, and whether there would be sufficient volume for that and whatever water was added to the fire. It turned out to be sufficient.
- It was decided to attempt to extinguish the fire with foam.
- After about 15 minutes of foam application, the attack was called off because the foam was not holding. There as too much heat coming off causing the foam to break up and allow reigniting of the fire.
- Chief Tenger remained on site throughout the night. Allowing the fire to burn was not causing significant problems. The fire had reduced itself somewhat by morning.
- Next day, Chief Tenger was relieved by Chief Griffin. After briefing and planning meetings, another attempt was made because the fire had reduced in size during the night.
- The fire was attacked with foam a second time at 1400 hrs on Dec 23, 1010.
- The attack method was the same as previous day, but this time it worked at knocking down the fire.
- Fire was fully knocked down at 1420 hrs.

Discussion of possible Suggestions:

- Chief Tenger had no recommendations for changes. He felt that the management of the fire had gone well, and that the Palomar Power station had been adequately prepared.