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ByTomDalzell
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The construction and maintenance workers employed by **Pacific Gas & Electric** are in the field every hour of every day, operating and maintaining one of the largest gas pipeline and electrical distribution systems in the world. Serving PG&E customers from Bakersfield to Eureka, we go to work with our customers' safety first and foremost in our minds.

In view of The Californian's Aug. 25 editorial, "What will it take to catch PG&E's attention?," let's make one point clear from the outset: The tragic San Bruno accident three years ago was PG&E's fault. The accident took place on the utility's pipeline, and PG&E has taken responsibility. But the revised penalty proposed by the Public Utilities Commission staff in July will actually reduce safety, while punishing ratepayers and placing at risk thousands of jobs of people who are working to keep customers safe.

A record-breaking penalty of the size proposed by the PUC staff, which would cost PG&E more than $4 billion, would set back badly-needed job-creating investments. Not only would it cost PG&E workers, but also employees at hundreds of the utility's suppliers and subcontractors. And it would delay or even derail entirely steps to modernize our energy system.

Wall Street took notice when the PUC staff dramatically increased the original penalty recommendation. Standard & Poor's and Moody's issued threats to downgrade PG&E's credit rating based on the revised penalty. If either agency were to cut PG&E's credit rating, it would immediately become more expensive for PG&E to raise money to fund investments.

Like all electric, gas and water companies, PG&E relies on institutional lenders and investors to finance billions of dollars of investments every year. That means even a slight increase in interest rates will raise costs by millions of dollars. And ratepayers will be forced to pick up the tab.

The revised penalty also reverses the original proposal that would have routed all of the money from the penalty back into safety improvements. Instead, the revised proposal takes hundreds of millions of dollars away from public safety improvements and turns it over to the state's General Fund.

The revised penalty jeopardizes critical investments in infrastructure. PG&E's plans for the next several years are estimated to support nearly 30,000 jobs. The proposed penalty threatens all of that growth, diverting funds from safety investments and the jobs those improvements would create.

Three years since the tragic accident, we believe the best way to pay respect to the victims and their families is to require PG&E to put every dollar back into improving the safety of the electric grid and gas-delivery system.

Taking away money from safety investment would punish ratepayers, compromise public safety and place at risk the jobs of many hard working men and women in Bakersfield and around the state.

Tom Dalzell is business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1245, representing nearly 12,000 PG&E employees from gas and electrical linemen to program managers and bookkeepers. Another View presents a critical response to a previous editorial, column or news story.