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Making Safety a Top Priority

By Rosanne Foust
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Perhaps more than any other part of the state and the country, San Mateo County is reliant on a sound infrastructure that fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. Our communities, employers large and small, our nonprofits, educational institutions and so many others rely on a stable infrastructure of transit options, water systems and energy to move people, activate ideas and power our growth.

In 2010, we learned first-hand just how important our energy infrastructure is. A tragedy defying definition happened in San Bruno and the community will never, ever be the same. This tragedy should not have happened. The critical role **Pacific Gas and Electric Company** plays in our energy infrastructure became clear. It is PG&E's role as our chief energy infrastructure steward that causes me to write today.

I strongly believe that since 2010, PG&E has revamped and revitalized their commitment to maintaining a safe and reliable energy infrastructure. Since the tragedy in San Bruno, I have watched firsthand the efforts made to change the culture within PG&E; to better communicate with our cities, elected officials and most importantly their customers. San Bruno will never be the same community and we, collectively, need to ensure that PG&E will never be the same company. I want a company that has the leadership, the intelligence, the commitment and the character to ensure a safe and reliable energy infrastructure for future generations.

The California Public Utilities Commission is in the process of levying a fine on PG&E for the San Bruno accident. While the CPUC is well within its rights to levy a large fine, I am concerned with news last week that the size of the fine being discussed may do irrevocable harm to PG&E's finances. PG&E's CEO mentioned the possibility of another bankruptcy if PG&E is unable to access capital in the marketplace as a result of the fine. The financial markets reacted accordingly and PG&E's rating dropped on several major credit agencies.

Let me be clear: The state of California and San Mateo County can ill-afford to have a major employer, a key infrastructure steward and one of California's most generous and consistent corporate partners enter bankruptcy. The CPUC should levy a fine that achieves the dual goals of recouping costs from the San Bruno accident and assures that utilities in the future know they are accountable for their infrastructure maintenance. Intentionally bankrupting PG&E achieves neither goal and should be rethought.

Rosanne Foust is the president and CEO of the San Mateo County Economic Development Association. She lives in Redwood City.

<http://www.smdailyjournal.com/articles/opinions/2013-09-13/op-ed-making-safety-a-top-priority/1775266.html>

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