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Edison to pay \$1.16B for Thomas wildfire

By Gina Kim

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Southern California Edison Co. agreed Wednesday to pay insurance companies \$1.16 billion to settle claims arising from the 2017 Thomas Fire.

Edison was facing thousands of claims from plaintiffs which include homeowners, public entities, owners of farms and vineyard, and insurance policy holders for its role in the blaze that burned 280,000 acres in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. The utility also faces claims for the subsequent Montecito debris flows that killed 21 people in the tony enclave in Santa Barbara County in January 2018.

“We are making significant progress toward resolving wildfire related litigation,” Pedro J. Pizzaro, president and chief executive officer of Edison International, said in a statement. “The settlement announced today resolves all the subrogation claims in the pending 2017 Thomas and Koenigstein fires and January 2018 Montecito mudslides.”

Over the last several months, Edison has resolved cases with several hundred individual plaintiffs, many through private mediation. Berger Kahn’s managing partner, Craig Simon, is co-lead for subrogation plaintiffs in the consolidated mass tort action presided over by Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Dan-

iel J. Buckley. “It will no doubt help Edison focus on settling the claims with the individual plaintiffs as they have pledged to do so,” Simon said. “We also want to thank Judge Buckley for his handling of this very complex case during a pandemic, and to retired Judge Peter Lichtman for helping bring the parties to resolution.”

Simon is part of the team representing insurers. Others on the team are Maura Walsh Ochoa of Grotefeld Hoffman, Howard Maycon of Cozen O’Connor and sole practitioner Shawn E. Caine. The same team is also co-lead in the 2018 Woolsey Fire mass tort, JCCP 5000, presided over by Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge William F. Highberger.

Last November, Edison reached settlements with 23 public entities affected by the Thomas Fire and the Montecito debris flow. With Wednesday’s settlement, \$6.2 billion has been paid out, the utility said.

Historically, subrogation groups are the first groups to settle claims in mass tort wildfire actions. Last year, subrogation counsel was the first group to settle with Pacific Gas & Electric Co for \$11 billion in connection with a string of Northern California wildfires from 2015 to 2018. They were also the first to settle with San Diego Gas & Electric Co. over a trio of 2007 wildfires.

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