

NorCal fire renews concern over SCV battery-storage facility

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The proposed site of an Acton battery energy storage system near Angeles National Forest Highway. Photo courtesy of Hecate Grid.



A dayslong fire at [the world's largest](https://www.energy-storage.news/moss-landing-worlds-biggest-battery-storage-project-is-now-3gwh-capacity/) battery-storage facility in Monterey County prompted Santa Clarita residents and officials to ask what-if and worst-case scenario questions about a similar but much smaller Terra-Gen operation in Canyon Country.

[Northern California outlets reported Wednesday morning](https://www.siliconvalley.com/2025/02/19/residents-urged-to-stay-inside-after-another-fire-burns-at-moss-landing-battery-facility/) that residents should stay inside after the Vistra Battery Facility began to emit smoke and set off alarms late Tuesday night.

Most troubling for observers is that the initial fire there began in January, with flames and plumes of toxic smoke leading to the evacuation of homes for more than 1,500 Moss Landing residents. While the cause of the newest incident at the 3-gigawatt facility is still under investigation, the weekslong incident [renewed concerns about the technology's safety](https://www.technologyreview.com/2025/02/13/1111843/battery-fire-moss-landing-power-plant/).

“Let me just say, the battery-storage issue that came up just a couple weeks ago, with the Monterey (County) fire was certainly enlightening,” Councilwoman Laurene Weste said during council member comment at the Feb. 11 meeting.

Weste said the Soledad Canyon project, which was approved by the Planning Commission in December 2021, never came before the City Council.

Each of the five members of the city's Planning Commission are appointed by a separate council member. Any council member has the right to appeal a planning decision.

Council members and residents have asked whether Santa Clarita would be safe in the event of such an incident. Several residents even asked for personal assurance from the Fire Department.

City Manager Ken Striplin responded to the concerns with a memo to the Santa Clarita City Council, which was obtained by The Signal, discussing the project's approval process and the local training efforts that could prevent a similar incident from happening in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Soledad Canyon background

The company behind the Canyon Country battery-storage facility, Terra-Gen, submitted plans for an 80-megawatt lithium-ion battery storage in February 2021.

The structure was eventually built on 3.5 acres about 450 feet east of the intersection of Sierra Highway and Soledad Canyon Road. The site is south of the retail center anchored by the Canyon Country Post Office and directly adjacent to a Southern California Edison substation.

In August 2021, [planning commissioners raised questions \(https://signalscv.com/2021/08/planning-commissioners-raise-questions-about-battery-storage-facility/\)](https://signalscv.com/2021/08/planning-commissioners-raise-questions-about-battery-storage-facility/) about the location and fire and seismic safety of the proposed 55,000-square-foot facility.

During the initial hearing for the project in 2021, Mark Turner, representing Terra-Gen, repeatedly assured commissioners that "thermal runaway" events, when a part of a battery storage facility catches fire, are rare. In response to Turner, Commissioner Lisa Eichman said no member of the commission wants "to be responsible for 'unlikely or rare.'"

Terra-Gen did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

Weste also referred to the project as another energy mandate from the state that was being foisted upon municipal governments.

"It's one of those things that's being done all over the country due to the mandates for more (electricity) and the need to store electricity," Weste said, "which is self-evident with the power shutoffs."

The increase in battery storage statewide has been rapid and deliberate.

In an October 2023 release, the [California Energy Commission reported the state increased its battery-storage capacity by 757% \(https://www.energy.ca.gov/news/2023-10/california-sees-unprecedented-growth-energy-storage-key-component-states-clean\)](https://www.energy.ca.gov/news/2023-10/california-sees-unprecedented-growth-energy-storage-key-component-states-clean) between 2019 and 2023, which is enough power for 6.6 million homes for up to four hours. A year later, [a state dashboard \(https://www.energy.ca.gov/data-reports/energy-almanac/california-electricity-data/california-energy-storage-system-survey\)](https://www.energy.ca.gov/data-reports/energy-almanac/california-electricity-data/california-energy-storage-system-survey) indicated the state's 6.6-gigawatt capacity had more than doubled to nearly 13.4 gigawatts.

The commission indicated in October that figure only represented one-quarter of the state's goal of 52 gigawatts for 2045.

Powering up

Construction appears to be completed, but Terra-Gen's website did not list the facility on its website among its four battery-energy storage projects throughout the state that deliver enough energy "to power 1.5 million homes for approximately four hours," according to Terra-Gen's website. City officials referred questions to Terra-Gen.

"At the (Dec. 7, 2021) meeting, the Planning Commission heard responses from city staff and the applicant, testimony from five public speakers in support of the project and two speakers in opposition to the project, as well as testimony from representatives of the Fire Department," according to Striplin's memo.

During the meeting, the fire marshal indicated "they would be able to address a fire in the event that there was an incident at a battery storage facility like the one proposed," according to Striplin's memo.

"City staff have followed up with Assistant Fire Chief (Pat) Sprengel, who confirmed that the Fire Department is trained and prepared to respond in the event there was an incident at a lithium-ion battery storage facility, like the one located on Soledad Canyon," Striplin's memo continued. "In fact, personnel assigned to fire stations in Santa Clarita recently underwent specialized training and participated in drill exercises to understand the best practices for response to an incident at a lithium-ion battery storage facility. Trainings will continue to occur on an ongoing basis."

Down the road in Acton

Safety concerns are the main reason why Acton residents have joined in a statewide campaign to support legislation that would slow the proliferation of the facilities, according to Ruthie Brock, leader of a local coalition that's been working in opposition to the facilities.

"Our official position is: 'Don't put BESS in Acton — it's not the right place for it,'" according to Jeremiah Owen, Acton Town Council president, in a June 2023 interview. He was one of several who shared problems with the project's seemingly streamlined approval process, which he said wasn't giving consideration to local concerns.

In November, Hecate Grid's Humidor BESS, or battery energy storage system, [received permission from L.A. County \(https://signalscv.com/2024/10/public-hearing-set-for-tuesday-on-humidor-battery-energy-storage-system/\)](https://signalscv.com/2024/10/public-hearing-set-for-tuesday-on-humidor-battery-energy-storage-system/) for a 400-megawatt facility, according to Hecate Grid.

The plans call for the company to develop 15 acres of a 26-acre plot next to West Carson Mesa Road to the west and Angeles Forest Highway N-3 to the east.

A group of residents fighting L.A. County's approval of the transmission facility ultimately ended up [suing the county and the applicant \(https://signalscv.com/2024/05/debate-continues-on-energy-storage-plans-for-acton/\)](https://signalscv.com/2024/05/debate-continues-on-energy-storage-plans-for-acton/).

Brock said the judge in their case indicated previously he was waiting for the county to formally approve the project before allowing the lawsuit to proceed. A hearing in the case is scheduled for Thursday.

"The Humidor project location was carefully selected to be far away from residential neighborhoods," according to a Hecate Grid website in support of the project. "The closest neighborhood is 4,000 feet from the proposed site. It is also located in an industrial area between a freeway and rail line, near other energy infrastructure."

Brock said Wednesday the recent Lidia Fire was about 3 miles from the proposed location for Hecate, but the fire threat remains for Acton and the surrounding community, which is why she's supporting the campaign behind [Assembly Bill 303](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260AB303) (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260AB303).

That bill would put a halt to the approval of any facilities 200 megawatts or greater in size and require any future facilities to require a 3,200-foot setback, which, she said, would have created a problem for the current Santa Clarita facility.

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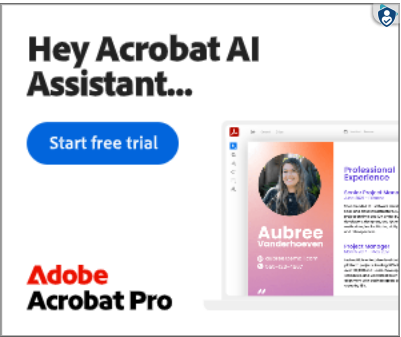
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