

→ Wildfire Litigation

On October 13, 2008, the Sesnon Fire broke out near the oil fields of Oat Mountain in northern Los Angeles, burning more than 22 square miles before being extinguished. The County of Los Angeles Fire Department (“LAFD”) claimed the fire was caused by a Southern California Gas Company (“SCGC”) electrical line that fell to the ground during high winds. Following the LAFD’s report, plaintiffs filed 18 lawsuits against SCGC and its parent company, Sempra Energy (“Sempra”). Various insurance carriers also filed actions seeking to recover payments made to policyholders as a result of the fire, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Services filed its own action seeking to recover costs spent fighting the fire. Collectively, the claims against SCGC and Sempra sought millions in damages, costs, and fees. Sheppard Mullin strategically settled all of the claims against SCGC and Sempra.

Wildfires like the Sesnon Fire caused by failed equipment, including electrical lines making contact with trees or the ground, expose utilities, property owners, and businesses to significant multi-plaintiff liability lawsuits with potentially crushing damages claims.

How Can We Help?

We provide strategic and proactive counseling to mitigate risk and potential exposure before a wildfire occurs. When a fire does occur, we are here to help you investigate, evaluate, defend, and manage the litigation that follows.

Why Us?

- Our team has successfully defended leading utilities like Sempra Energy, Southern California Gas Company (“SCGC”), and San Diego Gas & Electric Company in complex, multi-plaintiff wildfire litigation. We know the strategies and arguments plaintiffs’ attorneys use to build liability and damages cases, including inverse condemnation liability and smoke damage claims, and we know how to craft successful defense strategies that protect our clients.
- We have had unparalleled success defending insurers like Allstate and Liberty against inflated and fraudulent claims stemming from wildfires. We have a perfect record defending insurers in trial, including a defense verdict for Allstate in a wildfire case named one of the top 10 verdicts in California. We also have obtained hundreds of dismissals and judgments in wildfire cases through innovative and tenacious lawyering. In representing insurers, we have developed effective and novel strategies that can be brought to bear for our other clients.
- We have strong relationships with causation and damages experts experienced in wildfire defense work and are experienced in helping clients retain and manage such experts.
- We work cooperatively with our clients’ insurers throughout litigation and settlement.
- We aggressively defend our clients and have secured terminating sanctions against plaintiffs, as well as favorable outcomes on discovery motions, summary judgment motions, and motions in limine – all of which translate into significant savings for our clients.