

Jun. 7--The state sued Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for \$1 million Friday, saying the utility was responsible for a fire that charred nearly 1,000 acres in the Yuba County foothills two years ago.

The Attorney General's Office filed the case in Yuba County Superior Court on behalf of the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which seeks reimbursement for its firefighting costs.

The lawsuit alleged that a 74-foot-tall foothill pine tree fell into transmission lines. They broke and touched off what was dubbed the Field Fire, burning land off Scott Forbes Road owned by the University of California at its Sierra Field Station.

The tree "had been marked with blue paint by PG&E indicating it was a hazardous tree that should be removed," the lawsuit said, but remained untouched.

The lawsuit said PG&E, apparently through a contract forester, had marked the tree in 1998.

Lisa Randle, the local PG&E spokeswoman, said the company doesn't comment on litigation.

"It was a hazardous tree," said Deputy Attorney General Teri Ashby. "They forgot, or something. They had already marked it as a hazard."

In all, CDF had 590 people and eight strike teams battle the Field Fire. Another 116 personnel were assigned to the Colgate Fire, also in the Yuba County foothills.

Stiff winds were blamed for pushing both blazes.

"If you get a sickly tree and the wind comes along, it's probably going to fall," Ashby said.

The lawsuit said the tree was leaning at a 27-degree angle when it was blown into the power lines.

PG&E "had a duty to maintain the electrical transmission and distribution lines on the UC Davis Field Station property free from trees leaning towards the lines that could fall on the lines and cause a fire to ignite," the lawsuit said.