



## **Vistra's Moss Landing Fire, Artificial Intelligence & Cutting Corners**

January 31, 2025

Moss Landing, Calif.

On January 16, 2025, Vistra's MOSS 300 Battery Energy Storage System in Moss Landing, Calif., a power plant largely managed and monitored by artificial intelligence, caught on fire. The Vistra fire, the result of poor business practices, lack of safety standards and a lack of a sufficient fire suppression system, impacted neighboring communities for miles. Residents would be evacuated by order of the Monterey County Sheriff only to return while fire officials stood by waiting for the Vistra BESS to burn out, helpless to do anything further.

In the aftermath, many residents have complained of symptoms from the chemical fire at Vistra's BESS. Vistra would report that its outside consultant, CTEH, had deemed the air quality safe despite nearly 80% of Vistra's 100,000 battery MOSS 300 building having burned. The County of Monterey and the EPA would also tell residents that everything was perfectly safe while failing to conduct proper monitoring and tests, instead deferring to Vistra's consultant, CTEH. However, researchers from San Jose State University's Moss Landing Laboratories would later conduct soil testing that revealed elevated levels of nickel, manganese and cobalt. These are the very same heavy metals found in the LG NMC lithium-ion batteries in Vistra's MOSS 300 building. These were also the very same batteries that had previously overheated, resulting in an emergency services response and a later town hall meeting held in September of 2023.

At the time of the town hall in September of 2023 with elected and public safety officials in attendance alongside representatives from Vistra and PG&E, Vistra had assured officials and those in attendance that it had “analyzed and repaired” the batteries in question that overheated. Vistra did not state that it had replaced or made any improvements to its MOSS 300 battery energy storage system. 16 months later, Vistra's MOSS 300 would burn once it was overtaken by uncontrollable thermal runaway.

Vistra's Senior Vice President of Environmental Health & Safety, Cynthia Vodopevic, was quoted at the September 2023 town hall in a Pajaronian article as saying, “We know that there are inherent but manageable risks in all forms of generation, transportation and storage of energy.”

Cynthia Vodopevic, however, leaves out a key piece of information on what Vistra Corp. considers to be “manageable”. When it comes to managing such an inherent risk one would expect the physical location to be monitored by on-site staff, including a dedicated, on-site plant manager.



Meet Connecticut resident Peter Ziegler, who identified himself as a Vice President of Operations and the Moss Landing Power Plant Manager, during public comment at the County of Monterey Board of Supervisors Emergency Meeting on January 21, 2025. Peter Ziegler is also the manager of the Oakland Power Plant.

Peter Ziegler is a frequent contributor to Vistra's employee political action committee (PAC) that has made contributions to Rep. Jimmy Panetta, State Senator John Laird and Assemblymember Robert Rivas. Ziegler last made a contribution on December 27, 2024 to the sum of \$416.66, reporting his residence was located in Westport, CT.

How is Peter Ziegler, a resident of Connecticut, able to “manage” both the Moss Landing and Oakland Power Plants under the control of Vistra? Artificial intelligence. Peter Ziegler, for tax purposes, must reside in the state of Connecticut for at least 183 days out of the year. That leaves only 182 days out of the year that Peter Ziegler is on-site in California “managing” both the Moss Landing and Oakland Power Plants. Depending on the route taken, the Moss Landing Power Plant and the Dynegy Oakland Power Plant are approximately 95 miles away from each other. In commuter traffic it could take a motorist more than 2 hours to travel between these locations.

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In recent years, Vistra has partnered with McKinsey & Company to improve efficiency and reduce emissions using artificial intelligence. A 2023 Forbes article would report that, “A successful neural network developed by Vistra and McKinsey at the Martin Lake Power Plant in Texas achieved efficiency gains of around 2 percent after just 3 months of operations resulting in an added value of \$4.5M.” The Forbes article would also state that, “Vistra has since scaled the technology across its power plants.” Artificial intelligence isn't just used to improve efficiency but it's also utilized to monitor equipment failures, thus from a corporate perspective it eliminates the need for a dedicated human to continuously monitor the system and increases profitability.

At the September 2023 town hall meeting, Vistra, alongside PG&E, had described the previous incidents at the Moss Landing Power Plant as a “learning experience.” Clearly Vistra, or rather its artificial intelligence, has learned very little leading up to the January 16, 2025 fire. Vistra would later offer a \$750 gift card through local community non-profits to eligible households that were inconvenienced by the evacuation.

Source Links:

<https://pajaronian.com/power-plant-fires-explored-at-town-hall-meeting/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2023/06/29/the-promise-and-peril-of-ai-inenergy/>

[https://www.fec.gov/data/receipts/?data\\_type=processed&committee\\_id=C00226548&contributor\\_name=Ziegler&two\\_year\\_transaction\\_period=2024](https://www.fec.gov/data/receipts/?data_type=processed&committee_id=C00226548&contributor_name=Ziegler&two_year_transaction_period=2024)