

Former PG&E attorney to head EPA West Coast office

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The Environmental Protection Agency has named a former attorney for the nation's largest utility to head its West Coast office, replacing the regional director ousted from the post last week.

John Busterud, who worked for Pacific Gas and Electric for three decades, will manage more than 600 staff employees and oversee environmental protection efforts across EPA's Region 9, which includes 50 million people living in California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands and tribal lands, KQED reported Tuesday.

Mike Stoker, the EPA's regional director since 2018, said he got a call last week from senior agency officials in Washington, D.C., telling him to resign.

The change in leadership comes amid conflict between California and the federal government over environmental policy.

Among the disagreements are the Trump administration's policies aimed at expanding domestic oil and gas production, and its rollback of environmental regulations. California, a state with robust environmental enforcement, is seeking to transition away from fossil fuels.

Busterud's experience includes serving as a board member for the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance, a group that represents the natural gas industry, among other types of business.

At PG&E, Busterud directed the department of the environment and real estate. He worked on issues related to air and water quality, endangered species, toxic waste and environmental policy, according to an EPA press release.

Busterud retired from the company's law department in 2016 after serving 30 years with the utility.

Busterud said in a statement that it is an "honor and privilege" to take the position with the EPA, and that he looks forward to working with EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. "We are committed to building on the agency's legacy of success by providing clean and safe air, water and land for all Americans," Busterud said.