

SB County supervisors urge halt to Diablo relicensing

Sam Womack, Santa Maria Adobe Press, 8-13-10

Touting a responsibility to protect Santa Barbara County residents from an unlikely, but possible emergency at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant, the Board of Supervisors took a tough stand last week.

The board backed San Luis Obispo County supervisors and voted unanimously to send a letter to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) urging a halt to the plant's relicensing process and requesting an immediate in-depth study into a seismic fault near the Pacific Gas & Electric Co.'s facility.

Initial studies show the fault, which was discovered in 2008 and is 38 miles long and 19 miles deep, could generate a 6.5 magnitude earthquake, according to Michael Harris, Santa Barbara County director of emergency services.

The power plant in Avila Beach could weather an earthquake of that magnitude, according to industry analysis, but both county boards requested that the NRC hold off relicensing the PG&E facility until a new three-dimensional seismic study is completed and reviewed.

"Renewal of the license should not take place until all seismic studies have been done and everyone is satisfied that there is no danger," said 5th District Supervisor Joe Centeno, toward the end of the more than two-hour hearing on the NRC letter.

Santa Barbara County emergency officials are cautiously concerned about "the failure to determine the threat posed by the recently discovered fault line," according to the staff report.

In the unlikely event of an emergency, such as an accidental release of radioactive material, the North County would be notified and would care for evacuees from San Luis Obispo County and offer any needed services, according to county staff.

PG&E representatives argued that the convoluted, lengthy and expensive process of license renewal should be allowed to proceed while the \$16 million, three-dimensional seismic study is undertaken.

The board also was reminded several times throughout the hearing that the NRC can shut down the facility any time a danger or threat to the public is presented.

On Aug. 12, the NRC was expected to announce whether paying for the earthquake study was an appropriate use of rate-payer funds. Results were not available by press time.