

NRC workshop turns into Diablo Canyon debate

Matt Fountain, San Luis Obispo New Times, 9-16-10

Roughly 100 people attended a two-day workshop held by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) aimed at educating the public about earthquakes and tsunamis, and how nuclear power facilities are built to hold up against them.

Though the event was supposed to be educational in nature and not address the relicensing issue, recent safety incidents at the plant, or the need for an increase in renewable energy, such familiar arguments crept in to nearly every aspect of the workshop.

NRC representatives stressed that seismic studies and a license renewal are two separate issues.

On Sept. 9, the second day of the workshop, newly elected state Senator Sam Blakeslee, a San Luis Obispo Republican, made a surprise appearance and implored NRC reps to “go beyond a check-the-box approach” to license renewal.

Blakeslee, who authored several pieces of legislation regarding seismic and nuclear safety, emphasized the need for comprehensive seismic studies surrounding Diablo Canyon, what he called “a very momentous issue.”

Diablo Canyon has been a hotbed of controversy dating back to its construction when the Hosgri fault was discovered just offshore, and amplified by the recent discovery of the Shoreline Fault, which is even closer to the power plant, in 2008.

Utility giant Pacific Gas and Electric, which operates Diablo, is currently conducting mapping of the Shoreline Fault; based on preliminary studies, the utility has determined the plant could withstand even the most powerful earthquake the fault is believed to be capable of shaking out.

Many who attended complained the information was overly technical and posed little or no use to them in addressing concerns about the safety of the plant. Norm Abrahamson, PG&E’s lead seismic expert for Diablo Canyon, said the workshop was intentionally technical in hopes that local professors and officials would take interest.

However, a few speakers pointed out the timing and setting of the workshop made it difficult for many to attend.