

Ballot measure would shut state's 2 nuclear plants, analyst finds

The nonpartisan report says the closure of San Onofre and Diablo Canyon would disrupt one of the state's most reliable power sources and have profound effects on the economy. Sponsor Ben Davis Jr. needs 504,760 signatures to qualify the Nuclear Waste Act of 2012 for the ballot.

Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times, 11-26-11

A state ballot initiative proposed for next fall would force California's two nuclear power plants to immediately shut down, causing rolling blackouts, spikes in electricity rates and billions of dollars in economic losses each year, a nonpartisan analyst has found.

The report by the Legislative Analyst's Office says the shutdown of San Onofre in northern San Diego County and Diablo Canyon in San Luis Obispo County would disrupt one of the state's most reliable power sources and have profound effects on government and the economy.

The two plants generate nearly 16% of California's electricity, the report says, calling them "integral parts of the state's electricity grid."

The Nuclear Waste Act of 2012 would prohibit nuclear power generation in the state until a permanent disposal site for high-level nuclear waste is approved by the federal government.

The initiative, proposed by Ben Davis Jr. of Santa Cruz, was approved for signature-gathering last week. Supporters must collect 504,760 signatures by April 16 for it to qualify for the November 2012 ballot, according to the California secretary of state.

California has had a moratorium on new nuclear power plants since 1976, though state law exempted the existing facilities at San Onofre and Diablo Canyon, which store their waste on-site.

Because no permanent nuclear waste disposal site exists in the United States, if the measure were enacted it would be years before the plants could resume operation, the analyst says. The federal government, however, could step in to prevent the law from taking effect to ensure uninterrupted access to electricity.

The loss of the San Onofre plant, in particular, would "reduce the capacity to deliver electricity in the Los Angeles Basin area to below state and local standards for reliability" and significantly increase the risk of rolling blackouts in the region, the report says.

One positive note, the analyst says: The measure could save state and local governments from paying for a nuclear emergency, such as a major radioactive release.

Davis, a delivery driver and self-taught legal professional, said he proposed the measure in response to the tsunami and radiation crisis at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex earlier this year. He called the legislative analyst's projections "very dire and very unrealistic. It's not an accurate analysis at all."

Davis said he launched a similar ballot initiative targeting the state's two nuclear plants in 1988 but abandoned it after a critical report by the analyst. This time, he intends to forge ahead with a signature drive.

A spokesman for Southern California Edison, which operates the San Onofre plant, declined to comment until the initiative qualifies for the ballot.