

Cheap, safe power from Diablo Canyon

Kathy Staples, Santa Maria Times, 9-22-11

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on May 11 requested that U.S nuclear power plants provide information regarding their individual seismic mitigation strategies and safety programs.

Each of the plants located in the United States responded to the NRC with the programs and steps they have in place to address severe earthquakes that are not only within their basic designs but many plants have plans beyond the basic design requirements.

Diablo Canyon Power Plant is located here on the Central Coast, and therefore is of critical importance to all of us, and it is important for us to know how PG&E is addressing potential effects of large earthquakes and tsunamis.

U.S. utilities have used historical data and projections of the most severe earthquakes, and have constructed the plants not only to meet that occurrence, but to go beyond those maximum occurrences as mandated by the NRC.

According to a recent presentation by the NRC to the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors comparing the Japanese Fukushima plant and the Diablo Canyon facility, was that the water from the tsunami in Japan overwhelmed the power generators needed to operate the safety equipment.

The earthquake in Japan did not damage the buildings at Fukushima, but rather the emergency generation and electrical rooms that provide power to run the equipment. That is the important issue and difference with the Diablo plant.

At Diablo, the emergency diesel generator and the electrical rooms that provide power to the plant equipment are 85 feet above sea level, safely above tsunami wave heights. This is public information that PG&E has provided at town hall meetings and presentations.

Additionally, the plant stores spent nuclear fuel safely in pools that are founded in rock and have walls that have up to 6 feet of reinforced concrete. They are also lined with stainless steel.

In the case of an emergency, PG&E has the ability to add water to the pools, using either electric or diesel-powered pumps. Some groups opposed to nuclear power postulate that if the cooling water was lost in the pools, the spent fuel would overheat and cause zirconium fires. According to information about Fukushima, that did not happen.

As a part of PG&E's safety action plan submitted to the NRC, they have started to package nuclear fuel into canisters for dry storage. The spent fuel will be stored in a temporary facility at the power plant until the federal government collects the containers.

Although storage of spent fuel in pools has been proven to be safe, it is important that our federal government make progress in developing a permanent federal repository.

Diablo Canyon has an excellent safety record, and has safely provided power to more than 10 percent of California for over 25 years.

Along with large hydro power plants, it is the least expensive power provided by PG&E. Power from Diablo Canyon costs about 4 cents per kilowatt hour, compared to 20-30 cents per kilowatt hour for some other forms of renewable energy. It is an important component in our state's energy mix.

Renewing the operating license for an additional 20 years is the right thing to do for California.