

County seeks seismic expert

Colin Rigley, San Luis Obispo New Times, 9-15-11

San Luis Obispo County wants to keep an eye on Pacific Gas and Electric's seismic studies of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

Six months after a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami led to a meltdown at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, SLO County supervisors voted unanimously to find a seismic expert who can represent the county as PG&E and the state review the seismic safety of Diablo Canyon.

There are two significant seismic features near Diablo Canyon: the Hosgri and Shoreline faults.

In August 2010, the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) gave PG&E permission to conduct three-dimensional seismic studies in the area surrounding Diablo Canyon and recover its \$16.73 million cost from ratepayers. As part of that approval, the PUC established an Independent Review Panel to analyze the findings of the seismic study, which should be completed in 2013. However, PG&E has until 2015 to complete the study.

On Sept. 12, PG&E Senior Vice President and Chief Nuclear Officer John Conway updated SLO County supervisors on the company's response following the Fukushima disaster, which included an update of the onshore and offshore studies already underway. The company is awaiting an Environmental Impact Report before it can conduct rigorous offshore 3D studies.

PG&E has been criticized in the past for what some people, including Sen. Sam Blakeslee, thought was a lax analysis of Diablo Canyon's vulnerability to earthquakes.

County supervisors voted unanimously to appoint a county representative—a seismic expert hired on a contractual basis—to participate on the review panel.

PG&E has a pending request to recoup additional costs beyond the original \$16.73 million estimate. County staffers originally suggested tying the county's request to have a representative on the panel with PG&E's new application, but supervisors instructed staffers to file separately.

The county will also seek reimbursement for its contracted seismic expert, estimated to cost \$250,000.