

# **State legislature passes bill to continue Diablo Canyon oversight**

**David Sneed, San Luis Obispo Tribune, 9-17-15**

The California Legislature has unanimously passed a bill that will continue safety oversight of Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant by two government groups until the plant's two operating licenses expire in 2025.

Assembly Bill 361 by Assemblyman Katcho Achadjian, R-San Luis Obispo, extended the PG&E ratepayer funding mechanism for the San Luis Obispo County Office of Emergency Services' oversight of the power plant.

The bill authorizes the county to spend as much as \$1.73 million a year from PG&E to coordinate emergency planning and preparation in the event of a radiation release from the power plant. That funding was scheduled to expire in 2019.

It also authorized the continued operation of a state panel of seismic hazard specialists who oversee PG&E's studies of the earthquake hazard facing the nuclear plant.

Without the extension, the Independent Peer Review Panel would have disbanded in November.

"This bill will guarantee that our local governments have the necessary funding and tools to continue their emergency response planning for any disaster that occurs at Diablo Canyon," Achadjian said. "Also, this bill will ensure that seismic studies at the plant are carefully reviewed by an independent panel so that our community will be well prepared if an earthquake strikes."

The bill was coauthored by Sens. Bill Monning, D-Carmel, and Hannah-Beth Jackson, D-Santa Barbara. It was passed by the Legislature on Sept. 11 and sent to Gov. Jerry Brown, who has until Oct. 11 to sign or veto it. Achadjian said he is optimistic the governor will see the need for the bill and sign it into law.

On Tuesday, the county Board of Supervisors authorized Chairwoman Debbie Arnold to send a letter on the board's behalf to the governor, urging him to sign the bill. PG&E also supports the passage of the bill.

The bill will ensure the continued good coordination of emergency planning, said Blair Jones, PG&E spokesman. Also, the seismic expert panel has provided valuable technical insight, and the utility supports its continued existence.

However, relations between the Independent Peer Review Panel and PG&E have been rocky at times. County Supervisor Bruce Gibson, a seismologist by training, is the county's representative on the panel.

Earlier this year, he criticized PG&E for ignoring the panel's recommendations and downplaying the seismic hazard at Diablo Canyon. However, PG&E has denied this, saying the utility has incorporated the panel's input into its seismic analysis and reports.

The county Office of Emergency Services has six full-time employees and its current annual budget is \$1.72 million. Of that, 81 percent comes from PG&E for Diablo Canyon emergency planning, said Ron Alsop, county emergency services manager.

Located on the seismically active Central Coast, Diablo Canyon's main safety threat is a powerful earthquake. PG&E maintains a team of seismologists at Diablo Canyon that continually assess the seismic threat.

In 2010, the state Public Utilities Commission established a multi-agency team to oversee PG&E's seismic studies, called the Independent Peer Review Panel. Gibson praised the passage of the bill, saying the panel's work is not done.

"I think there's an ongoing need for independent scientific oversight of the seismic work that PG&E is doing," he said. "That's just good policy."

The San Luis Obispo-based nuclear watchdog group, the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, lobbied the Legislature to pass Achadjian's bill. The group's executive director Rochelle Becker was also pleased with the bill's passage.

"That this bill moved through the Legislature in a bipartisan fashion with no opposition demonstrates our state's concerns with the ongoing costs and potential reliability of our one remaining nuclear generator," she said.