

Public questions Diablo renewal

Matt Fountain, San Luis Obispo New Times, 2-10-10

County residents grilled representatives of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) at two recent public meetings the federal agency held to answer questions about the review process for Pacific Gas and Electric Company's application to renew its operating license for Diablo Canyon power plant.

The meetings were held at Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo on Feb. 9 and included brief presentations outlining the renewal process, followed by lengthy question-and-answer sessions.

Several topics came up repeatedly, including why no such application has ever been denied by the NRC. According to NRC Environmental Project Manager Andrew Stuyvenberg, the process is a lengthy one, prompting applicants to invest years of research and millions of dollars before ever applying. Stuyvenberg pointed out that no initial application has ever been granted as is.

Many speakers asked the panel why the application is being considered many years ahead of the deadline. NRC Safety Project Manager Nate Ferrer said regulations state 20 years of plant operation is sufficient to assess the aging and environmental issues related to a particular site and that roughly a third of all renewal applicants submitted applications earlier than Diablo, where the oldest reactor has been operating for 25 years.

The point raised most frequently was PG&E's application to the NRC before seismic studies have been completed and reviewed by state agencies, as was mandated by Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee's bill AB 1632, in light of the discovery of the Shoreline Fault less than a mile offshore from the plant.

Fred Collins, a Chumash tribal councilor who reportedly grew up in the area that now houses the plant, told the panel he hadn't heard anything that sold him on the safety of the plant, nor that addressed tribal concerns.

"I just want these guys to do it right," Collins told *New Times*. "Especially with two faults now. It's like reading the signs on a trail: If you have one bear in the area, you'd better be cautious. You get two bears in the area, and you get out of the area."

County Supervisor Adam Hill, whose district includes Avila Beach and who recently sent a letter to NRC Chairman Greg Jaczko requesting a stay in the renewal process until seismic studies have been completed, attended.

The NRC's review of PG&E's application is still in its initial stages. The public is urged to submit comments and concerns for a March 3 scoping meeting, at which the NRC will identify issues to be addressed in a supplemental environmental impact statement, due out in October 2010.