

CPUC Approves \$4.5B for SONGS Decommissioning

By [Elizabeth McCarthy](#) Published On: December 16, 2021



Utility regulators rejected cost and safety concerns raised by ratepayer and nuclear safety advocates as they approved without comment a \$4.5 billion tab to decommission the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. Consumer advocates' concerns did not reveal "factual, legal, or technical errors in the proposed decision," according to the CPUC decision.

The SONGS decommissioning is the most expensive one in U.S. history, according to Energy Solutions, a major decommissioning contractor. It compared costs on a per megawatt basis.

The decision in the 2018 triennial rate case came Dec. 16.

Southern California Edison is the majority owner of the plant, shut down in 2013 because of a radioactive leak. San Diego Gas & Electric is a minority owner of the facility. San Onofre sits on the coast of northern San Diego County on property that is part of Marine Corp Base Camp Pendleton.

The Utility Reform Network said it will seek a rehearing of the cost issue, calling it legally and factually flawed.

"The decision adopted today represents a dramatic break with past CPUC decisions addressing the reasonableness of utility actions relating to nuclear decommissioning," said Matthew Freeman, TURN staff attorney. He added that in addition to the massive ongoing spending at SONGS, the CPUC is shielding the two utilities "from accountability and puts ratepayers in long-term jeopardy."

TURN identified numerous issues with money spent so far on decommissioning, from an alleged 1700% cost overrun on the selection of a general contractor, to \$66 million paid in 2017 to the contractor who essentially did no work. Freeman also warned about deficiencies in SCE's

contractual agreement, which were central to SCE's failure to recover costs from Mitsubishi for the defective steam generator that forced SONGS into early retirement.

For the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility (AN4R), the issue is the unsafe radioactive cleanup standard. AN4R calls for the levels to be on par with those of other nuclear plant closures in and outside of California. The Alliance also wants the anticipated higher costs for increased safety to be estimated.

Utility regulators in Maine and Connecticut required cleanup levels as low as 10 millirem. In addition, the Navy requires radiation left behind from SONGS to be no higher than 12 millirems on land across Highway 5 to the east of the site.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission requires SCE to leave behind no more than 25 millirem of radiation at the site. Any radioactive safety reduction levels attained by SCE and SDG&E beyond that level "will be as clean as practical," the utilities stated.

"Why wouldn't California want SONGS to match the radiation cleanup standard which SCE and SDG&E admit is applied to decommissioned plants in Connecticut and Maine?" said A4NR Executive Director Rochelle Becker. She said local groups successfully fought for tighter standards at PG&E's decommissioned Humboldt Bay Power Plant.

The opponents' safety level request lies outside the scope of the proceeding, the agency said. But federal law does allow states to set more stringent radioactive cleanup standards.

CPUC Okays Expensive New SCE Battery Project



Investor-owned utilities in California have lobbied hard to reduce payments to people who feed their excess rooftop solar power back into the grid, arguing the compensation costs ratepayers too much. At the same time, Southern California Edison has pushed for permission to recover from customers \$1.23 billion for 537 MW of new battery storage. On Thursday, the California