

NRC rules Diablo earthquake safe

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The Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant was declared earthquake safe by a federal licensing board in a decision released today.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensing board said it was satisfied with the review of the plant's seismic safety conducted by the NRC staff and was convinced the plant could safely survive the largest earthquake capable of occurring on the Hosgri fault, 3 miles offshore from the plant.

The ruling by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board was described as a "partial initial decision," meaning additional rulings are required before the NRC staff can be authorized to license Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s \$1.6 billion plant.

The licensing board said the additional rulings would stem from issues raised by the March 28 Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident near Harrisburg, Pa. The board also noted its decision could be appealed to an NRC appeal board.

The board's decision came as the NRC's advisory committee on reactor safeguards began expressing renewed interest in the seismic safety of the Diablo plant as a result of problems which occurred during the Three Mile Island accident.

The advisory committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday and Thursday in Washington, D.C., and receive preliminary reports on questions it raised on seismic safety.

The licensing board decision said PG&E had done an adequate job of investigating the length and capability of the Hosgri fault.

The fault was discovered in 1971 by two Shell Oil Co. geologists and brought to the NRC's attention in 1973.

The licensing board concluded that the underwater fault was about 90 miles long, stretching from Point Piedras Blancas to Point Sal, and had moved about 12 miles in the past 20 million years.

The board rejected Diablo opponents' contentions that the fault could be linked at the north with the San Simeon and San Gregorio faults and, with the other two faults, could have moved considerably more.

Meanwhile, in Washington today the Supreme Court refused to disturb the process by which the federal government considers environmental risks of proposed nuclear power plants. The justices, without comment, rejected arguments that the NRC should have to evaluate the consequences of the worst possible nuclear accidents.

Seven Florida residents had challenged the NRC's review system in connection with a 1973 request to build a nuclear power plant near Fort Pierce on Florida's east coast.