

Group protests Diablo seismic study delay

By Ronald W. Powell
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The San Luis Obispo-based Mothers for Peace has become the second group to formally object to a request by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to defer completion of a seismic study at Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant for one year.

PG&E has asked the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission for one additional year beyond the established deadline of July 31, 1988, to complete a study of faults that could potentially cause earthquakes in the Diablo Canyon area.

Completion of the study, called the Long Term Seismic Program, is a condition of PG&E's operating license.

Diablo Canyon is the only nuclear power plant in the country with the

seismic study requirement as part of its license, said NRC spokesman Greg Cook.

Nancy Culver of the Mothers for Peace said the organization decided to join the Sierra Club in objecting to the request because members believe PG&E does not plan to complete the study for fear of what it might show.

As part of its licensing amendment request for the year's extension, PG&E argued that granting the additional time would not pose a "significant hazard" to public safety. Culver fears the utility could use the same argument year after year as an excuse for delaying completion of the study while continuing to operate the plant.

"What they plan to do is put it (the study) on hold," Culver said. "If they ask for one delay after

another, the study will never be done."

Spokesmen for PG&E have said the extension is necessary because the company's seismic experts are needed to provide information to the state Public Utilities Commission for a pending multi-billion-dollar rate case. They also argue that the additional time would allow PG&E to produce a more thorough seismic study.

In its objection, the Mothers for Peace is requesting a public hearing be held to examine PG&E's reasons for asking for the extension.

Charles Trammell, NRC project manager for Diablo Canyon in Bethesda, Md., said the agency will review the arguments offered by the Mothers for Peace and the Sierra Club to determine if a hearing is warranted. If a hearing is approved,

it would be presided over by the NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, a three-member panel.

The hearing would be held in San Luis Obispo county.

The officials explained that the additional time is required so the company's seismic experts can complete work on PG&E's \$5.8 billion rate case before the state Public Utilities Commission.

In that case, PG&E argues that ratepayers should be liable for the full \$5.8 billion in construction costs for the twin reactor plant.

The PUC's public staff, assigned to represent consumer interests, has recommended the company be forced to absorb \$4.4 billion of the costs, saying PG&E management caused construction delays and cost overruns that should not be charged to the public.