

## HOSGRI FAULT

# Diablo quake study wanted

Blakeslee will ask state to assess threat; possibility of converting it to gas raised

By JEFF BALLINGER  
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Freshman Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee this week will propose state backing for a study that would examine the threat of an earthquake fault to the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

Depending on the study's findings, one result could be conversion from nuclear power to natural gas, he said.

Any changes in operations, however, would have to be supported by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Pacific Gas and Electric Co., which owns the plant.

Blakeslee, R-San Luis Obispo, will introduce a bill Thursday calling for the study to determine whether the Hosgri Fault just off the coast carries a big enough earthquake threat to the safety and viability of the plant.

Please see DIABLO, A10

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FROM PAGE ONE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2005

## Diablo

From Page A1

If so, another element of a bill would kick in to study an alternative to possible closure — the viability of converting the plant to a natural gas-powered facility. The idea would be to offer incentives to PG&E to build a gas-powered plant.

Blakeslee, recently appointed to the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee, said recent earthquakes spurred the idea for a state-of-the-art study. He said that any long-term facility transition process would take time.

(Licenses for Diablo Canyon's reactors expire in 2023 and 2025, and it is believed the plant owners will apply to re-license the plant years before then.)

"A project like this will take many years to accomplish," he said. "We need to start as soon as possible to fully understand the seismic issues using state-of-the-art technology and data and to provide PG&E with an alternative to re-power the facilities."

PG&E officials are less than receptive to the idea.



Sam Blakeslee

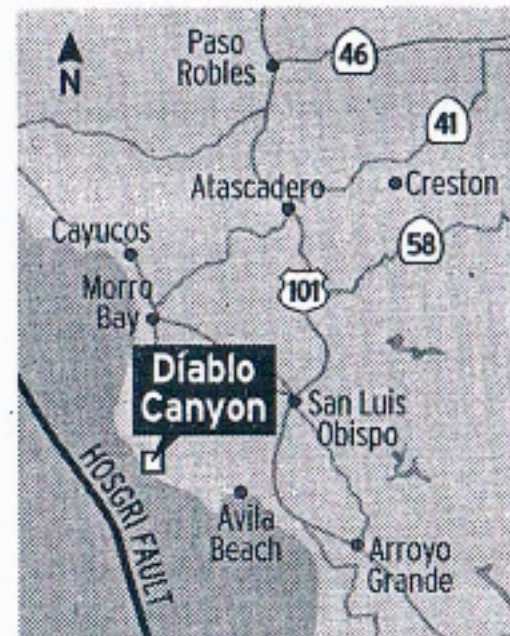
"We think this is a very costly and highly impractical idea that would create significant air pollution to replace a power plant that's been declared seismically safe

by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission," said PG&E spokesman Jeff Lewis.

Diablo Canyon, which underwent extensive earthquake studying when it was in the licensing phase, is built to withstand a magnitude-7.5 quake on the Hosgri Fault, which lies about 3 miles offshore of the plant. The question of whether Diablo Canyon could withstand a major quake was rekindled a year ago in the weeks following the 2003 San Simeon Earthquake.

While Blakeslee acknowledges there have been thick "phone books" of studies performed by the NRC and other consultants on Diablo, he says the assessments have still fallen short in their scrutiny.

"The NRC says the plant is



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safe, but they don't live here," he said. "A study needs to be done to increase the public's confidence."

State Sen. Abel Maldonado criticized Blakeslee's proposal, citing a need to maintain the current operation of a facility that provides 1,300 jobs, significant tax revenue and an important portion of the state's energy supply. "The security and maintenance at Diablo Canyon are second to none," Maldonado said. "They bend over backward to make sure that plant is safe."

Maldonado also said he will

meet with Blakeslee this week to discuss the proposal and his opposition to it. Both Maldonado and Blakeslee have districts that include Diablo Canyon.

But 2nd District County Supervisor Shirley Bianchi agreed with Blakeslee that better assessments need to be done, and she also encouraged a transition from nuclear operation.

"I'm really pleased," Bianchi said. "I think it's a step in the right direction. There are many scientists who are apprehensive about having a nuclear power plant so close to an earthquake fault. There are all sorts of newer technology that would be able to make a better determination."

Lewis, however, cited other concerns.

A gas-fired plant would produce an estimated 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide emissions and 14,000 tons of nitrogen dioxide emissions annually, Lewis said. The current plant's waste issues involve radioactive fuel rods, which are stored on site but have been at the center of safety concerns. Also, a natural gas-powered electricity plant producing the same 2,200 megawatts of power would em-

ploy fewer than 100 people, he said. Diablo has 1,300 employees now.

Blakeslee insisted, however, that if a quake shut down the plant, even temporarily, it would have an economic ripple effect locally and statewide.

"It occurs to me that we should first use the most advanced techniques possible to determine the risk to the plant," he said.

Members of Mothers for Peace, a local nonprofit activist group on nuclear issues that has long opposed Diablo Canyon's operation, agreed that an extensive study is long overdue. "We've asked for that since 1974," said Liz Apselberg, director of the group. "We have always been worried about that."

Blakeslee, a financial planner who also holds a doctorate in earthquake studies from UC Santa Barbara, will propose that the agencies with greatest oversight — the California Public Utilities Commission, the California Energy Commission and the California Independent System Operator — conduct the study. If the review finds the potential for significant damage, he

envisions the creation of a list of economic incentives for PG&E to convert the plant.

Blakeslee said any alternatives produced by the study would be voluntary for PG&E. The power to compel the company to take action could come only from the Nuclear Regulatory Agency.

"That's why I'm seeking to create a voluntary consensus and provide information on the risks and the opportunities — so PG&E can make the decision," he said.

Blakeslee said he has spoken with PG&E governmental affairs officials in Sacramento and that their feedback has helped shape his proposal. He declined to characterize their reaction to the plan.

It's too early to tell what such a study could cost, Blakeslee said.

"This is just a prudent contingency analysis of what could happen and what your options are."

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