

NuclearNewswire

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POWER & OPERATIONS

CPUC votes in favor of 5-year extension for Diablo Canyon

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The Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant. (Photo: Doc Searls)

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) voted last Thursday to extend the life of Diablo Canyon an additional five years. The decision was the final step in the extension of the state's last remaining nuclear power plant, whose two reactors will now operate until at least 2029 and 2030, respectively, instead of closing in 2024 and 2025.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is currently reviewing Pacific Gas and Electric's license renewal application, which would grant a 20-year extension to the plant if approved. The NRC previously granted the utility a "timely renewal" exemption, allowing operations at Diablo Canyon to continue during the review period after PG&E withdrew its 2018 application.

Nuclear advocates celebrate: "Although it's only for the additional 5 years, this decision sends a signal to the rest of the world watching—nuclear energy is VITAL to a reliable, clean energy system," tweeted Paris Ortiz-Wines, global director of the international advocacy group Stand Up for Nuclear.

Diablo Canyon is the largest power plant in California, providing 8 percent of the state's electricity—all of it carbon free. Its premature closure in the mid-2020s would likely have prompted the state to build more natural gas to quickly make up for the lost capacity, backpedaling on its clean electricity goals.

In 2016, PG&E announced that it planned to retire the plant's two units in 2024 and 2025, reasoning that the setup of California's energy regulations, influenced by antinuclear environmental groups, favored an influx of renewable sources that hurt the economic standing of nuclear.

But in the last several years, nuclear advocates have formed a powerful grassroots coalition to save the plant, amplifying the importance of Diablo Canyon for stabilizing California's electric grid and preventing the use of more fossil fuels. In September 2022, in a remarkable shift in tone in the state's nuclear policy, Gov. Gavin Newsom approved the possibility of an extension with the passage of Senate Bill 846. The bill also contained a \$1.4 billion forgivable loan to PG&E.

Nuclear momentum: Riding on the coattails of COP28, during which more than 20 nations pledged to triple their nuclear capacity by 2050, the announcement of Diablo Canyon's extension signifies continued support for nuclear on both a regional and global scale. It reflects a growing recognition that nuclear energy is a safe and reliable source of clean energy that can address both climate change and energy security issues.

ANS statement: Following the decision, ANS President Kenneth Petersen released the following statement "The American Nuclear Society applauds the decision by the California Public Utilities Commission to extend the operations of Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant through 2030.

"The California PUC commissioners made the right choice in preserving California's largest and most reliable clean energy source, Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant. Keeping California's lights on requires keeping Diablo Canyon online.

"Extending plant operations of Diablo Canyon beyond 2025 will safeguard California's clean energy transition by shoring up California's power grid with an always-on and affordable source of dispatchable clean baseload electricity, generated by nuclear energy.

"We thank California's state policymakers, including the PUC and Gov. Newsom, for their leadership in preserving Diablo Canyon's zero-carbon energy. We also want to thank and congratulate Diablo Canyon's allies, grassroots supporters, and local California ANS members for their hard work and success in saving Diablo Canyon."

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