

South Bay Power Plant Needs to Go Away

On July 27, 2009 Laura Hunter from the [Environmental Health Coalition](#) spoke at the regular meeting of the [Southwest Chula Vista Civic Association](#). She did a presentation explaining all the negative effects of the SBPP on the health of the marine environment and human health. It was built as a base load plant to run 24/7, which it did for many years. Now it is so old and decrepit and expensive to run that it is being used like a peaker power plant and only runs when there is an unusual need for electricity. It is kept running 24/7 so that it can fire up quickly. We get all the negative affects of its pollution but little benefit electricity wise any more.

[Part one of Presentation](#)

[Part Two of Presentation](#)

[Part Three of Presentation](#)

[Part Four of Presentation](#)

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No ruling on South Bay power plant

State board postpones decision on discharging heated water

By Leslie Wolf Branscomb
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The state Regional Water Quality Control Board heard close to four hours of testimony yesterday on Duke Energy's continued discharge of heated water into the San Diego Bay from its power plant on the Chula Vista bayfront.

Environmentalists pleaded with the board to take action yesterday to force Duke Energy to bring the power plant into compliance with existing environmental laws.

But the board did not, because its staff members said they need more time to finish responding to the many written comments received on the matter. The permit issuance was rescheduled for the board's Nov. 10 meeting.

The new hearing date cuts close to when the board majority is likely to change substantially. Opponents of the permit said they have been waiting three years for a decision and feared they would have to begin all over to bring new board members up to speed.

There are three vacant seats, and the terms of three of the six sitting board members are up Sept. 30. Though two have applied for reappointment, it is common for a new governor to appoint members of his own choosing rather than reappoint members picked by a previous governor of a different political party.

There is a 60-day grace period, which would allow outgoing members of the board to

remain and vote until the end of November.

At issue is the permit that allows the power plant to discharge water into the bay. The 44-year-old plant uses outdated technology that requires seawater to cool the system. Up to 601 million gallons a day is drawn into the power plant, circulated through it, then discharged back into the bay.

Environmentalists have long complained that this process harms the marine environment in a variety of ways.

For one, small fish and fish larvae are sucked into the power plant's intake and killed.

When the water is discharged back into the bay, it is hotter than the surrounding seawater. Sometimes it is up to 23 degrees warmer than the bay water, and on hot summer days the temperature of the discharged water can reach 100 degrees, according to Water Quality Control Board engineer Hashim Navrozali.

Copper is also being discharged into the bay from the plant's corroding copper pipes, as is chlorine, which is used to keep the pipes clean.

The environmentalists and Duke Energy officials were at odds yesterday over whether those effects are significant.

Duke Energy scientists said the number of fish caught in the intake was very small considering the number in the bay and didn't impact the overall health of the fish population.

Jim Peugh of the Audubon Society said he found it incredible that up to 50 percent of mudsucker fish, which provide food for birds, are killed near the power plant.

"I know a lot of herons that would sue if they could," Peugh said.

Duke Energy officials said water samples should continue to be taken 1,000 feet away from the plant, because it provides the best representative sample.

The environmentalists want the water sampled right at the end of the four discharge pipes, where it is undoubtedly the hottest. Board members yesterday were leaning toward having the sampling done at the power plant's property line in the water, which is not quite at the end of the pipes, but much closer than the current sampling location.

Duke Energy is in a bind because while state clean water laws require them to reduce impacts on water quality, another state agency has forbidden them from shutting down or curtailing operations.

Reducing the temperature of the discharged water might entail cutting the plant's generation of energy by up to 60 percent, according to Water Quality Control Board engineers.

However, the state Independent System Operator, or ISO, which oversees the power grid, has placed the South Bay power plant on "must run" status for the foreseeable future.

The Port of San Diego owns the power plant's bayfront site. Duke Energy's lease with the port is up in January 2010. Randy Hickok, vice president of Duke's California operations, said that when the lease expires the port decides whether the plant should continue to run. The plant may be shut down, it could be rebuilt on the same site, or a new power plant may be built at a different location, Duke officials said.

Any replacement facility would not use seawater for cooling, Hickok said.

Lawrence Tobias of the ISO said that even though two new power plants are due to come online in San Diego County by 2008, they probably will not provide enough replacement energy to allow the South Bay plant to be closed altogether.

The last time the power plant's discharge permit was up for renewal, in late 2001, the board halted the proceedings so further studies could be done on the plant's effect on the bay. The board members felt at the time that the existing studies, which were more than 20 years old, weren't sufficient.

Duke Energy hired a firm to study the environmental issues surrounding the power plant's water discharge. The study took place from December 2002 to December 2003. Duke submitted a draft report to the Regional Water Quality Control Board in May and a final report last month.

The Water Quality Control Board staff is recommending a permit renewal, but with a changed location for discharge sampling, and stiffer requirements regarding temperature and copper in the water. They recommended a five-year schedule to allow Duke Energy to comply.

Duke Energy officials lobbied to keep the sampling station at 1,000 feet into the bay, and said it was probably impossible for the power plant to reduce copper in the effluent, given that the plant uses the best technology that was available for a power plant of its kind.

A coalition of environmentalists who attended the meeting wanted a shorter timeline for compliance, a closer sampling station and an immediate "cease and desist" order to put pressure on the power plant's operators.

Bruce Reznik of San Diego Baykeeper exhorted the board members to "do your job" and make a decision yesterday on the permit.



EARNIE GRAFTON / Union-Tribune
The state Regional Water Quality Control Board did not act on Duke Energy's discharge of heated water into San Diego Bay.

Marco Gonzalez, an attorney for the Surfrider Foundation, suggested that any more delay would result in a lawsuit. "Why invite litigation from us – again – when in fact you have every shred of information you need to make a decision today?" Gonzalez said.

But Water Quality Control Board staff members said they need more time to make changes to the recommended permit, based on yesterday's testimony, and to respond to comments.

Documents containing details of the Regional Water Quality Control Board recommendation are available at the board's office at 9174 Sky Park Court, San Diego or on the Web at <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb9/>.

Additional written comments will be accepted until Wednesday. The board will discuss the permit next at its Nov. 10 meeting, at 9 a.m. at the same location.

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■ **In November they granted a 5 year permit that expires in November of 2009. The Regional Board is going to reconsider this permit again in 2009. If they can be convinced to deny it, it may be possible to get rid of the plant.**