The Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant Fact Sheet

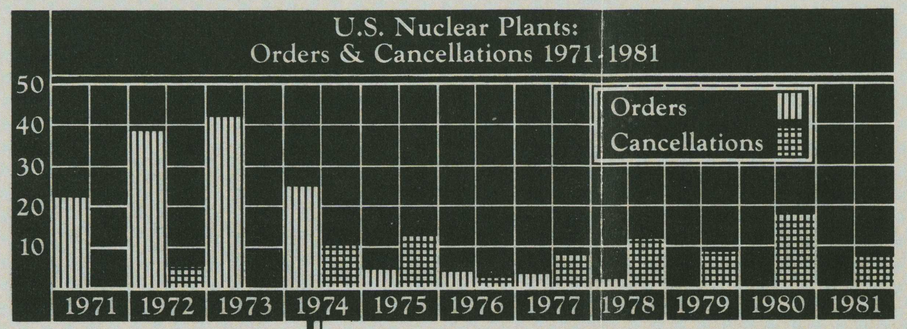
Need:

◆PG&E once claimed that if Diablo Canyon were not operating by 1975 there would be widespread blackouts and brownouts. Many years have passed, Diablo has yet to operate, and PG&E's threat has not been realized. In fact, electricity demand in PG&E's service areas has grown rather slowly. Instead of the annual 7.5% growth rate forecast by PG&E when they started building Diablo, demand has only increased by approximately 1.5% annually.

This situation mirrors the experience of utilities nationwide. According to a May 3, 1982 L.A. Times article, "After years of predicting shortages and blackouts, most utilities have more excess capacity today than they did 10 years ago." The Times article quotes Richard Metzler, a utility consultant with Theodore Barry and Associates, as saying that "You are really seeing a classic over-supply of a basic commodity... You can make a strong case that utilities have become a permanent no-growth industry."

True, PG&E needs new electricity sources to maintain an adequate reserve margin, to replace retiring power plants and retiring contracts for electricity purchased from other utilities, and to displace oil and gas fuel now burned in power plants to generate electricity. But the California Energy Commission says that California (and PG&E) "has a large and varied menu of electricity needed by 1992." The options, all preferable to nuclear power, are "enormous, far exceeding the total need for this period." Conservation efforts and development of safe, renewable sources of energy eliminate the need for electricity from Diablo Canyon.

It is clear that PG&E's decision to construct Diablo Canyon was not entirely based on the need for power. The Public Utilities Commission (P.U.C.) guarantees utilities a rate of return of 12.2%, which means that for every dollar invested in Diablo Canyon, PG&E gets that investment back plus 12.2 cents profit. So for any investment of 2.6 billion, a profit of $317million is realized. Given this incentive structure, it is no wonder that PG&E has preferred projects — such as Diablo Canyon — that required large amounts of money to build.



Economics:

◆Nuclear power, once thought to be a clean, economical answer to the nation's energy needs, is now recognized to be neither. Since its inception, the commercial nuclear industry has been heavily subsidized by the federal government. These billion dollar subsidies are not included when the cost of nuclear energy is calculated, causing such figures to be artificially low.

The ever-increasing cost of constructing and operating nuclear power plants has resulted in a great deal of skepticism among investors. Some examples:

1. For Diablo Canyon, PG&E's original estimate of $350 million for the plant has risen to over $2.6 billion, a significant cost overrun.
2. The credit ratings of nuclear utilities have plummeted in the wake of Three Mile Island, which shows that a company may be faced with bankruptcy after a single accident.
3. The cost of cleaning up Three Mile Island will exceed what it cost to build it.
4. Decommissioning or removing reactors from service is also extremely costly; it is now known that decommissioning can cost as much or more than plant construction itself.

It is ultimately the taxpayers and ratepayers who absorb these expenses.

Low-Level Radiation:

◆Nuclear power plants routinely release radiation into the air and water. Studies of "low level" radiation have consistently shown that any radiation (no matter how minute) will increase the chances of cancer and birth defects.

The small Shippingport, Pa. nuclear power plant (built by Westinghouse) was regarded as one of the safest in existence. After 12 years of "normal" operation, it was discovered that the cancer rate increased by 184% locally, compared to increases of 10% for the state and 8% nationally. (Secret Fallout, E.J. Sternglass)

Radiation causes damage because it penetrates into the body and changes the molecular structure of RNA and DNA in cells. These cells, once exposed to radiation, can become defective. Children, because of their rapid tissue growth and cell division, are especially susceptible to the effects of radiation.

Physicians have found that radiation-caused mutations contribute to lowered-life expectancy, decreased fertility, an increase in physical and mental disease, and an alarming increase in infant death rates.

Aside from routine releases of radiation, nuclear power plants, during accidents have released large doses of radiation.

Faced with the possiblity of large radiation releases at Diablo Canyon, San Luis Obispo County was forced to develop an emergency evacuation plan.

Evacuation

◆Experience has prov
evacuation plannin
quires a large expenditure
assurance of success. It p
security.

At Three Mile Island t
plan. Some of the major p
included: separated familie
closed banks and service
due to excessive traffic an
or absence of receiving sit
dalism and looting.

Many of these probler
there is an accident at Dia
the San Luis Obispo Count
possibility of an earthquak
occuring simultaneously.