

Unending problems shut down Trojan permanently



NORTHWEST

PORTLAND (AP) — The Trojan nuclear plant was shut down permanently Monday, three years ahead of schedule, because of continuing problems in the steam generating system.

The plant, on the Columbia River about 40 miles northwest of Portland, has been closed since Nov. 9.

The board of directors of Portland General Electric Co., the plant's operator, voted unanimously Monday not to reopen the plant. About 700 of the plant's 1,300 workers will be laid off by the end of the year.

"To those people, I'd like to express my personal sadness that we could not find another alternative to this solution," PGE chairman Ken Harrison said at a news conference.

Workers were told of the decision Monday afternoon.

"None of us really believed it would come to that," engineer Mary Jane Ross said. "So some of us were pretty shocked. ... It's kind of a tough way to start the year."

About 200 temporary and contract workers with less than one year of service will lose their jobs by the end of January.

In August, PGE announced that the 1.1 million kilowatt plant would close permanently in 1996 because of microscopic cracks in the steam generator tubes.

"Based on new information and events, we are accelerating the decision we made in August to phase out Trojan," Harrison said.

Harrison said the decision was based on economics.

"We believe the plant can operate safely again," Harrison said at a news conference. "It's the cost associated with that option that has driven this decision."

The utility cited the recent disclosure of disagreement among government scientists over Trojan's safety. Nuclear Regulatory Commission documents showed the chances of a core meltdown at the plant could be 300 times greater than permitted under government safety goals.

The plant was shut down two months ago after a cracked tube led to the release of traces of two radioactive gases — krypton and xenon — into the atmosphere.

Questions about the plant's safety "thrust the company into an environment of uncertainty which will translate into higher costs and less operating availability," the utility said.

"Closing Trojan now is the least-cost decision given all available information," Harrison said. "It is the best deci-

sion for our customers, shareholders and Oregonians."

Harrison estimated \$40 million to \$60 million will be saved by closing Trojan early. The cost of decommissioning the plant is estimated at \$400 million to \$500 million, Harrison said.

Harrison said the utility would not ask for any more rate increases associated with the shutdown unless there are drastic changes in the supply of power from other sources.

PGE already has filed a request with the state to recover the cost of replacing power from the plant. The Public Utility Commission has not ruled on that request. PGE estimates it has cost \$200,000 to \$400,000 per day to replace the power lost from Trojan.

Replacement power will be purchased primarily from utilities in Southern California and British Columbia, Harrison said. The continuing economic slump in Southern California has made additional power available there, he said.

PGE plans to sue Westinghouse Electric Co., the plant's manufacturer, to recover at least some of the cost of replacing the electricity and the shutdown, Harrison said.

Voters in November rejected two ballot measures that would have closed the plant Sunday.

Greg Tozian, a sponsor of one of the ballot measures, said he was "elated" that the plant would not reopen.

"It's unsafe; it's unnecessary; it's uneconomical," he said.

"It's unfortunate that we had to spend \$2 million in the election to get this done," Tozian said. "PGE spent \$5 million. We could have all saved a lot of money."

Harrison said conditions have changed since PGE fought the ballot measures.

"Obviously if we'd had a crystal ball, we wouldn't have done that," he said.

Trojan, Oregon's only commercial nuclear generating plant, was completed in May 1976 at a cost of \$460 million and was designed to last 40 years. In its first year, it produced more power than any other commercial nuclear plant in the nation.

The plant has an annual operating budget of about \$200 million and can generate enough electricity to serve 600,000 to 700,000 residential customers.

The plant was closed for the first time in 1978 after the NRC discovered the plant's control center did not conform to earthquake standards. That same year, two workers received radiation doses five times the federal limit, the largest at a U.S. commercial nuclear plant.

In 1986, the first of three ballot measures to close Trojan failed. Another

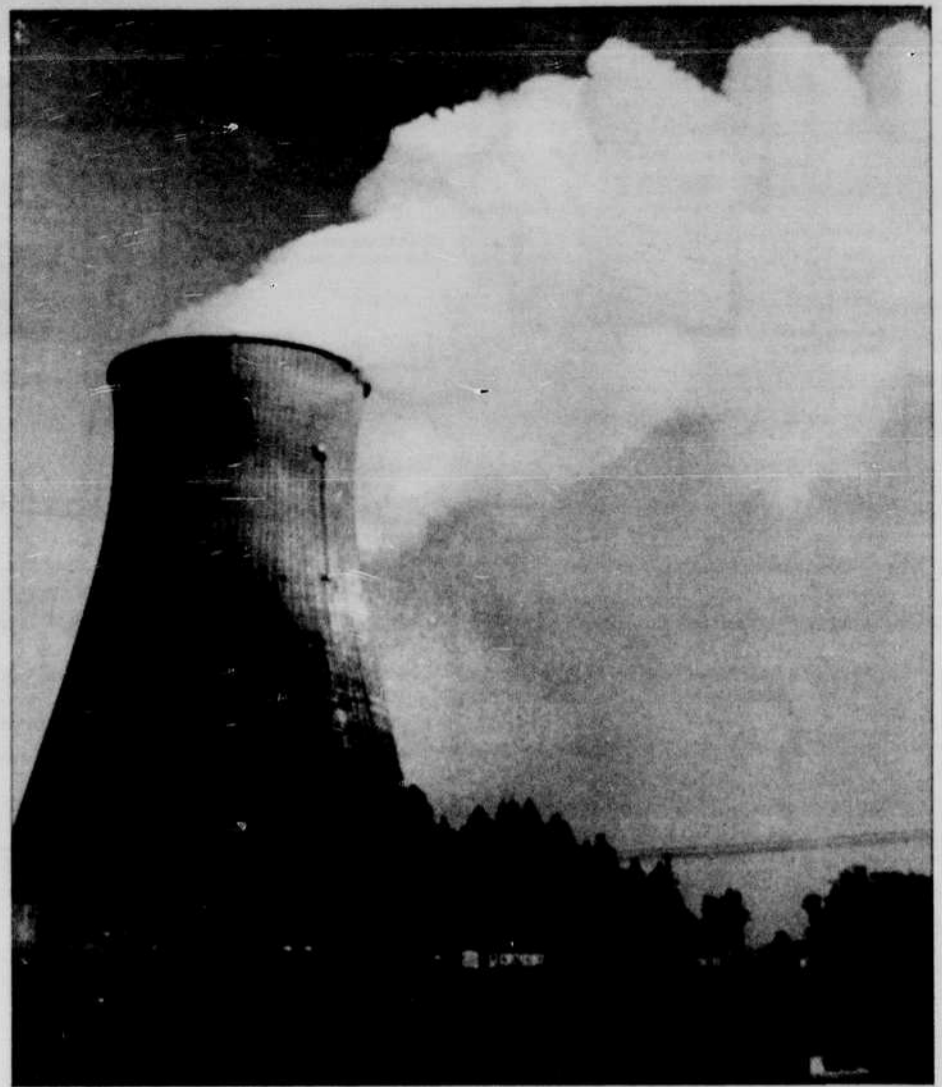


Photo by Michael Shindler

The Trojan nuclear power plant shut down permanently Monday because of persistent problems with the steam generator system.

measure was defeated in 1990.

Problems with steam generator tubes and electric seals forced a year-long outage in 1991. PGE denied rumors of a permanent closure at that time but said repair costs could reach \$125 million. A year later, federal documents indicated the plant may not be capable of withstanding a serious earthquake.

PGE holds 67.5 percent ownership of the plant. Another 30 percent is owned by the Eugene Water and Electric Board, which has turned over control of its share to the Bonneville Power Administration. The remaining 2.5 percent is owned by Pacific Power & Light Co.

Over the next month, PGE will remove the 191 radioactive fuel rods from the reactor core and transfer them to the spent fuel pool, where about 500 rods already are stored, PGE spokesman Steve Sautter

said.

It will take about four years for the rods being removed from the core to cool enough to be moved elsewhere. However, the federal government has yet to establish a permanent disposal site for spent radioactive fuel.

Harrison urged that those who sought the plant's shutdown and the utility "work together to pressure the federal government" to establish a permanent disposal site.

PGE will apply to the NRC for a non-operating permit that will allow it to keep the plant idle.

Phil Johnson, a spokesman for the NRC in Walnut Creek, Calif., said the agency had been informed of the decision not to restart the plant.

"I don't think we have anything to say at this point," he said.

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