

Trojan closure stuns workers

RAINIER (AP) — The decision to permanently close the Trojan nuclear plant took many employees by surprise, but they continued to strongly defend the safety of the state's only nuclear plant.

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

Reactor operator Joseph Taylor, 30, was at the plant when the announcement was made to workers.

"After the announcement, people still went about their jobs, making sure everything was done," said Taylor, who is also Rainier's mayor.

"I was impressed with their attitude. These people are trying to bring home a paycheck for their families," he said.

Taylor said the plant is safe but Portland General Electric, the plant's operator, finally gave in to the costs of the lengthy shutdown.

"I work at the plant, my family lives in Rainier, five miles from it. I believe it's safe," Taylor said. "But it became a battle of time. You can't shut it down for two months and expect it to survive economically."

Adam Bless, 40, inspected safety at the plant for the Oregon Department of Energy for the past three-and-a-half years.

"The decision came as much of a surprise to me as the other plant staff," he said.

'It's a shock to everybody, there's a lot of sad faces. It's soon going to be a ghost town out here.'

— Jack Jones,
PGE contractor

"We think they've done a good job with respect to safety, but now we know that it cost them a lot of money," he said.

"You can't know when the plant might be down, it's too unpredictable," he said. "I think that's what got PGE, not just the cost but the uncertainty."

Construction worker Jack Jones said PGE supplied most of his yearly income with contract work since Trojan opened in 1975.

"It's a shock to everybody, there's a lot of sad faces," said Jones, 41. "It's soon going to be a ghost town out here."

"We're just going from hour to hour," he said. "Maybe they'll tell me not to come in tomorrow or maybe it will take a couple of weeks."

Community ponders affects of shut down

RAINIER (AP) — Business owners believe their town will be economically devastated now that Trojan, the nuclear powerhouse that fed them, is permanently shut down. But they refuse to shut down their hopes for the future along with it.

"It's tough sledding and it's going to get tougher," said Juilene Wuollet, 39, who owns Interstate Tavern, one of the town's 40 businesses.

"I've laid off everyone except one employee and I'm working over 100 hours a week just to keep afloat," she said of her establishment near the only traffic light in town. She estimated Trojan employees account for 20 percent of her profits.

"I don't know what the future is going to bring this little town of Rainier," she said. "I fear it's going to become a little ghost town."

The town of 1,700 started as a lumber community, but the last of three nearby mills closed 10 years ago, leaving the nuclear plant the area's dominant employer.

Trojan's operator, Portland General Electric Co., has paid \$40 million to \$50 million a year to the plant's 1,200 employees, said spokesman Steve Sautter.

PGE also pays 70 percent of the property taxes that support the Rainier School District and the Rainier Rural Fire Department.

"We don't know yet what the new property value of a shut-down Trojan will be," said Gene Carlson, superintendent of the school district. Carlson added that 10 children in the district have parents working at the plant.

Mayor James Taylor said 130 of the plant's employees live in Rainier. They're among the best-paid citizens, he said, and they spend their money in local stores.

"I use the attorney in town, the barber shop, the grocery shop," said Taylor, who also is a nuclear operator at Trojan.

"It's kind of disheartening," he said. "You work really hard to make this community work and then the major employer decides to close down their plant."

Paul Elam, 48, owner of M.R. Sales furniture store, said the plant's closure took the town by surprise.

"It was a shock to hear Trojan was closing after they just bought a refrigerator and four microwaves the other day," Elam said. "but our store will still be here."

Gene Elder, 62, owner of Luigi's Pizza, said Trojan employees often call him in the morning asking for up to 60 pizzas for lunchtime. The establishment scrambles to deliver the pizzas on time to the isolated plant, about three miles away.

Elder hopes the crew of several hundred left behind to decommission Trojan will continue to phone in orders. "I guess we just got to keep making good pizzas and sell more," he said.

Overlooked by the larger towns of St. Helens, which is 17 miles away, and Longview, Wash., across the river. In between are scattered houses and woods.

"We're little and caught in the middle," said Linda Lopossa, 42, who owns Karol Lee and Beauty Shop. "It's hard already for businesses here to keep abreast and have a go at it. The shutdown will have a real economic impact: Some will go under."

"Every spring our business doubles when Trojan shuts down for maintenance and brings in contractors to do repair work," added hairdresser Cinda Meyers, 33.

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— Jewel Villager,
Rainier merchant

Trojan's spent fuel lacks storage facility

RAINIER (AP) — One of the first steps toward decommissioning the Trojan nuclear plant will be removing the reactor's spent fuel rods. But it's not clear what will then happen to the highly radioactive material.

The federal government has yet to establish a site in the United States for permanently storing radioactive spent fuel rods such as those in place at Trojan.

Work will begin this month to remove Trojan's 191 fuel rods from the reactor core and transfer them to the spent fuel pool, where about 500 rods already are stored, Portland General Electric spokesman Steve Sautter said Monday.

It will take about four years from the time the rods are removed from the core to be cool enough to be moved

elsewhere, Sautter said. Where they might be permanently stored is unknown since no such facility currently exists in the United States.

Seventeen sites have been selected for study as a possible storage dump for radioactive spent fuel rods, most on Indian-owned land in Oklahoma, Utah and Alaska, Minnesota, South Dakota, New Mexico, Arizona and Washington state each have one reservation targeted as potential radioactive storage sites.

The government is seeking sparsely populated land to store spent nuclear fuel rods from reactors for several decades after which the radioactive waste would be shipped to a permanent waste dump planned at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

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