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Nuclear Initiative

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Prediction of Rolling Blackouts has not Occurred with the San Onofre Nuclear Plant Offline

Santa Cruz, CA – 02/24/2012 - We have been receiving many questions concerning why the recent closure of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) has not resulted in the rolling blackouts predicted in the Legislative Analyst's (LAO) fiscal analysis for the California Nuclear Initiative. We respond below.

The recent closure of SONGS shows that the LAO's fiscal analysis for our initiative is incorrect to the extent that it predicts rolling blackouts costing the state tens of billions annually. These predicted blackouts have not occurred with the recent SONGS closure. Why? Because the LA Basin has ample energy without SONGS.

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) and Cal ISO, report "The LA Basin Local Area has 12,309 MW of capacity. It requires 10,600 MW to maintain reliability. SONGS, at 2,340 MW, is critically located in the southern part of this Local Area." (*Senate Energy, Utilities, and Communications Committee Informational Hearing: After Japan: Nuclear Power Plant Safety in California, April 14, 2011*). Thus, without SONGS, there is still 9,969 MW of power available in the LA Basin, leaving only 631 MW to be replaced to "maintain reliability." (12,309 MW current capacity - 2,340 MW generated by SONGS = 9,969 MW)

As the recent closure has shown, and as one might expect, the 631 MW has proved to be readily replaced, and the suggestion that SONGS is somehow critically positioned has been disproved, as well.

In response, the industry has changed its argument to say that blackouts would only be expected during a few peak days in the summer months. However, the LAO made no distinction for season (neither does the PUC report quoted above), and appears to have premised its conclusion of a tens of billions cost for rolling blackouts on year-round occurrences. The LAO also recognized in its analysis that the legislature would take emergency actions to bring new power sources on line, if necessary, to avoid blackouts.

It is also important to note that the LAO, in response to our Records Act request, could not produce one document from any state or industry source stating such rolling blackouts would result from closing our state's nuclear power plants. In their letters to the LAO concerning the fiscal effect of this initiative, the California Energy Commission and CAISO specifically omitted any mention of rolling blackouts or the associated costs. Purportedly, the LAO based its conclusion that blackouts would occur on verbal sources from CAISO - sources whom refused to be named or make such statements on the record.

Clearly, the nuclear industry is changing their statistics as circumstances prove them incorrect. Had the industry initially reported to the LAO that grid instability would cause blackouts only during the peak hours of a few summer days, if at all, the fiscal analysis would have been significantly different.