

# NUCLEAR FREE TIMES

For a safe and sound energy future

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## Humboldt Nuke Faces Dismantling

By Jim Adams

Twenty-two years after shutdown, PG&E's Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant may become the first commercial reactor to be dismantled or decommissioned in the US. A major project got underway in September as the 250 ft. tall concrete vent stack began to be demolished.

The utility has also announced its intent to remove 390 spent (irradiated) fuel rods from the pool at the plant, and place them in on-site steel containers called dry casks. For more than a decade, Redwood Alliance has urged PG&E to take this action. This will keep our community safe and allow complete dismantling to take place.

Four miles south of Eureka and adjacent to Humboldt Bay, the Humboldt nuke sits on top of and close to major earthquake faults. The Alliance has worked since 1978 to make sure that the nuclear plant, one of the oldest and dirtiest in the country, would never reopen and will be properly dismantled.

The Alliance intervened this winter before the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the state agency that regulates PG&E, to suggest changes to the utility's decommissioning plan that will protect public health, safety, and envi-

ronmental quality, as well as save ratepayers money.

The Humboldt reactor operated from 1963 until 1976, when it was shut down for refueling. While idle, a geologist coincidentally documented seismic hazards near the plant. This prompted a lawsuit by local citi-

zens, including State Senate candidate Wesley Chesbro. The reactor was never restarted. Soon after, the plant was placed in "SAFSTOR" (we like to call it UNSAFSTOR) condition.

Redwood Alliance supports PG&E's recent efforts, but wants several modifications to their plans. First, we want assurance that a \$156 million (which may grow to \$210 million) trust fund earmarked for plant decommissioning is not used for operations and maintenance. Next, we insist that an independent board of consultants oversee the entire process to help prevent what happened in the 1980s when

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*Redwood Alliance intervenes in the decommissioning plans for the Humboldt Nuke Plant!*

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## Green Electricity Recommendation

By Michael Welch

(Some opinions herein are those of the author, and not Redwood Alliance.)

Redwood Alliance is making a recommendation for a green energy provider to replace your local utility. Our choice is the Green Mountain Energy Resources "Wind for the Future" program. Redwood Alliance signed up

with this program in November of 1998. If you choose Green Mountain and mention code C029 while ordering, they will make a significant donation back to Redwood Alliance.

Finding a provider that would sell "green energy" was not difficult. At first it looked like a lot of folks would jump on the green provider bandwagon, but it turned out to be only a handful and a few of those dropped out early, not wishing to invest significant advertising and organizational capital in a

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**Humboldt Nuke** *from page 1*  
PG&E misspent over \$40 million at the Humboldt plant (the Alliance intervened at the PUC, forcing PG&E shareholders to reimburse ratepayers). Finally, the Alliance wants PG&E to develop options for "low-level" waste disposal other than the hypothetical, expensive, and controversial Ward Valley dump planned for the Colorado River area of southeastern California.

The bottom line is the Humboldt nuclear facility must be decommis-

sioned as soon as possible to avoid serious impacts when a major earthquake takes place. The collapse of the concrete stack or severe damage to the spent fuel could wreak havoc on the facility, increase decommissioning costs, contaminate the environment, and imperil public health and safety.

Redwood Alliance has submitted expert testimony on this matter to the PUC and is participating in hearings this fall with a final decision expected in January or February of 1999. 

**Green Electricity** *from page 1*  
project with a largely unknown bottom line. Sure, the polls said that 60% or more of electricity buyers would be willing to pay extra for green energy, but how much extra and at what degree of hassle to switch over?

Even Enron, one of the world's largest energy companies, pulled out of the residential electric market in mid April after investing millions of dollars in advertising. They still intend to service the 30,000 households that have signed up, but no more new ones. They said they couldn't make any money by offering discounts over what the utilities' prices and mandated sav-

ings were. This doesn't bode well for residential customers under restructuring. The promise of cost savings due to competition is evaporating (exactly what was predicted by energy activists; that California restructuring is designed for manufacturers and big business, not residential consumers).

#### **The Worst Choice is "No Choice"**

There are two good reasons to switch providers. First is the quality of energy resource that is sold to us. Second, we should do it to help keep the green providers in business. In other words, choose a green provider quickly, because they, like Enron, may not survive in this cut-throat market without

signing up a lot of customers quickly.

We will also need to overcome our general distrust of any electric company, yet maintain a healthy skepticism. Sure, most investor owned utilities (IOU) suck, and Working Assets' inappropriate and misleading foray into green energy left a lot of people with a bad taste in their mouths. But we really need to support these new, budding green companies, or else we could lose the opportunity to have clean power.

We did a lot of research and thinking before coming up with GMER. We are loathe to give nuclear utilities a break, so any green provider associated with a utility immediately came under scrutiny. For example, PG&E spun off a new company called PG&E Energy Services which is now offering green energy. I cannot forget so easily how they shoved Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant down our throats, and now they try to claim their new and improved subsidiary is green? I don't think we'll fall for it. They may be selling power that can be looked at as green, but really most of it comes from their vast, taxpayer-built hydroelectric holdings in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. And selling some of their energy

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## **A Letter From Michael to Our Friends**

Renewable energy is making great advances. My association with *Home Power Magazine* has given me a whole new perspective about the importance of such advances. For a long time, Redwood Alliance was called a "safe energy organization," but we were best known as an "anti-nuclear group." We often told people that solar and wind were the replacement for nuclear and fossil-fueled power, but we didn't really know much about it back then. Now we are just as much a "pro-renewable" organization as we are "anti-" anything else.


*Home Power's* web site quotes an anonymous reader, "I've been an environmental and energy activist for over 15 years, and the single most important thing I have done to improve the earth and my own well-being was to get rid of the utility grid and install solar electricity at my home."

That may be true, and I feel much the same way. I have

been living without utility power for 10 years, and I love it. A handful of PV (solar electric) modules grace the south side of my home, happily charging batteries during the day so I can have lights, videos, a toaster, and other household electrical appliances when I come home.

My house has all the modern conveniences, I don't "freeze in the dark" as the utility industry would have you believe. All it required was an interest in learning, a modest investment, and, most important, the will to make the change.

We have a couple of volunteers that will be organizing another Take Your Bedroom Off the Grid workshop for this coming spring or summer. We urge you to keep an eye out for the workshop to help you on the path to energy independence.

In the meantime, until you can make all your own electricity, please get rid of your nuclear utility and sign up with Green Mountain Energy Resources. 

# Diablo Update: Safety Violations Ignored to Keep Plant Running


*By Jim Adams*

Neil J. Aiken, control room foreman at PG&E's Diablo Canyon nuclear power facility, released a report in April 1998, detailing his effort to address safety concerns that were ignored by the utility. As reported in the Los Angeles Times of May 14, 1998, Mr. Aiken believes "There have been several management decisions that had disastrous plant and equipment results, followed by Nuclear Regulatory Commission complicity in deceptive identification of causes."

For example, defective circuit breakers were installed during a power outage that compromised the integrity of pumps, valves, and other safety features that receive power through those

breakers. Mr. Aiken has brought his concerns to PG&E management, the NRC, and the Diablo Canyon Independent Safety Committee. The Mothers for Peace, a San Luis Obispo organization active on Diablo Canyon issues for twenty years, urged the California Public Utilities Commission to reopen rate hearings on the plant.

The Mothers and Aiken believe that PG&E is compromising safety to save money in the new competitive climate of electricity generation. "The problem was an escalation in these things about two-and-a-half years ago, and an arrogance about this stuff that bothers me," he said. "The direction of things is in a manner that leans toward less safety and greater risk."

In an related matter, PUC staff has made a surprise recommendation that no more money should be set aside for the decommissioning of the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactors. The CPUC is considering PG&E's 1999 General Rate Case which includes decommissioning issues for Diablo Canyon and Humboldt Bay (see Humboldt article). Redwood Alliance has challenged this recommendation in testimony that points out that there is a great deal of uncertainty about decommissioning large reactors. Assurance of adequate funds for decommissioning is crucial to protect the public health and safety. Eliminating funding for Diablo's eventual decommissioning at this time is premature and irresponsible. 

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## Take Your Bedroom Off the Grid

We will again hold our revolutionary workshop **Take Your Bedroom Off the Grid** to teach people how to make their own solar electricity. The workshop is tentatively scheduled for late spring or early summer.


Volunteer Sharice Low cut her community organizing teeth on the one offered during April of 1997. Sharice said, "We want to show folks that they can make their own electricity from renewable energy without spending huge amounts of money at one time. They can put in a small system and help it to grow over the years." This year, Sharice will be working with Chane Binderup, a new RA volunteer.

We polled the community last year to see if people wanted this workshop, and we were surprised by the number of responses we received in favor of us doing it. Based on that poll, we decided to hold the first workshop and now wish to do another one for those that could not attend the first.

The workshop is structured with 3 different options over 3 days, with 3

different costs corresponding to the number of days a person attends. The price structure is designed to be affordable to all. Each day of the workshop will build upon the previous day, with the final day culminating in an actual hands-on installation at a local residence. That way, each person can get the level of information they need.

We are here to educate the public on the benefits of renewable energy as an alternative to nuclear and fossil fuel. Just imagine turning on your light switch and gaining the satisfaction that in doing so, you are not contributing to the world's environmental problems, "Solar Employs, Nuclear Destroys."


We will line up workshop sponsors to help keep the attendance costs affordable for everyone. The last one was sponsored by the Northcoast Co-op, Alternative Energy Engineering in Redway, and solar contractor Electron Connection, near Yreka. Without their help, the workshops would only be ideas. Contact Redwood Alliance for further info. 

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## Stop Junk Mail


Do you think Redwood Alliance sends junk mail? Then send us a note, and we will remove you from our list. We only add folks to our list who have had some kind of contact with us, and we do not give our list to other groups.

Many organizations do send out bothersome, unsolicited mail. Vote against such things by either sending back their prepaid cards marked "NO JUNK MAIL!" or calling their toll-free phone numbers to complain and ask how they got your address. Find out who sold your address to them and call that company and complain to them, too. Some companies will not sell your address if you insist.

If enough of us do it, the companies will eventually find it much too costly to continue. 

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## Dry Firewood

RA and the other groups sharing our office need more firewood and kindling to get through this winter, please call us at 822-7884 if you can donate and deliver. 

## Green Power *from page 2*

to green markets only turns their non-green customers an even darker shade of brown. Ditto for Earth Source (or Edison Source), a subsidiary of Southern CA Edison, responsible for the San Onofre Nuke Plant.

### Totally Green is Rare

GMER is also partially owned by a Vermont Utility called Green Mountain Power Corporation, and herein lays a bit of rub. This utility has come under fire from northeastern activists for purchasing power from Hydro Quebec's huge hydro plants that have been built to the detriment of the traditional lands claimed by the indigenous people of Canada. The other owner of GMER is the Texas-based Wyly family, venture capital investors (little is known about how green the Wyly's other investments have been).

So, what do we use as the ultimate criteria for which green power provider to choose? A totally green company is best, but impossible to find. One that comes close is Sharp Energy, but I think there will be some other small ones out there. 100% of the power Sharp will produce comes from biomass. They use anaerobic digestion to turn swine waste into methane to power electrical generators. I am hesitant to recommend really small power producers because their primary experience is not usually in energy and that can effect longevity. Also, how green can a factory farm possibly be with its 300,000 hogs?

GMER appears to be in it for the long run. They have become the primary and best advertised reseller of green energy for California. Our recommended program actually results in new renewable energy resources being built. For every 3,800 customers that signs up for the "Wind for the Future" program, they will commission a new 700 kilowatt wind turbine. To us, that's where the rubber meets the road. If our energy choices result in more renew-

ables to replace the dirty technologies, then we will have made a difference. On the other hand, this program costs a bit more than what other companies offer and requires a length of time commitment. We get what we pay for, and what we want is more renewables.

GMER has two other programs which are greenish, but not as attractive as the wind program. Other companies are out there, too.

### Keep an Eye Out


Green power choices will be changing over the next few months and years. One company, Clean Power Works, that had to get out of the game early on, started with a great idea. They were hoping to find landfills that capture the methane from the digestion of all that garbage under the soil. I heard that they could not come up with the startup funds to compete. This is an opportunity for both municipalities that have landfills and forward-looking entrepreneurs that can bring them together and help them tap into their power reserves. Anyone out there?

What **not** to look for in a green electricity provider is something called the Green-e logo. This labeling program is touted to be the only way a customer can know if an energy producer is really "green." The problem is that it should really be called a "green washing" logo. This program is utility approved and funded by the same people that saddled California with its multi-billion dollar bailout of unwanted nuclear power plants. Unfortunately, the Green-e logo has gotten such a huge head start on any green certification program that it will likely be the only one out there.

Green-e companies can include 50% system power (the mix that has every source of power including large scale hydro, coal, oil, and nuclear) or 50% large scale hydro in their mix. Almost every energy provider has to use some system power as a cushion for fluctuations in available supply and

number of customers. GMER guarantees a maximum of 10% system power and fully expects zero.

Let me back-step a little... you could look for the Green-e logo as a clue that there just might be something there, then re-check out the provider to make sure they really are green. What if your advertised dolphin-safe tuna actually allowed a percentage of dolphin kill? What if organically grown foods allowed 50% pesticide use? Same thing with the Green-e logo.

Get green electricity soon with a sign-up form from Redwood Alliance. Or you can contact Green Mountain Energy Resources (please mention the Redwood Alliance code: C029) at 888-246-6730 or visit their web site at [www.choosewisely.com](http://www.choosewisely.com). Remember, the worst choice is no choice. 

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## Uncle Red Needs You

For years RA has been shaped, fed, and run by the same hard-working activists. Attrition has occurred among our activists without offering enough replacements for those that have left or reduced involvement because of outside obligations. In order for Redwood Alliance to become stronger than it already is, **we need you!**

### Activists Wanted

Redwood Alliance wants your projects. Here's the hitch: we also want you to work on them! You get the advantage of our resources and good name, practical organizing experience, and good feelings. Sometimes you can even get paid. All projects must fit our mission:

*"The Redwood Alliance is a community-based social and environmental organization whose main focus is advocacy and education to promote safe and efficient energy use and development."*

If you want to help make a change, then come see us or give a call. 