

NEVADA VIEWS

Out with the old: Time to close Reid Gardner power plant

BY FRANKIE SUE DEL PAPA
AND TIMOTHY HAY
SPECIAL TO THE REVIEW-JOURNAL

Posted: May 13, 2012 | 2:05 a.m.

Updated: May 13, 2012 | 9:12 a.m.

It's time for spring cleaning - closets, basements, and garages. Are old or little-used items still worth keeping?

Similar is the decision facing NV Energy and Nevada utility regulators about the Reid Gardner coal-fired power plant near Moapa: keep it or retire it?

Utility regulators help ensure wise stewardship of residents' and businesses' electricity dollars, protecting against unnecessary costs and risks (steering us clear of "money pits"). The decision on Reid Gardner shouldn't be difficult: Out with the old.

First, the age. The Reid Gardner coal plant is now nearly 50 years old. An antique rocking chair may gain value with time, but not a coal plant. Aging coal plants require increasing expenditures to maintain, and Reid Gardner is no exception.

The plant's latest need is updated air pollution controls. Reid Gardner lacks modern controls to cut its thousands of tons of emissions of nitrogen oxide, a component in harmful ozone smog in southern Nevada and Utah and the haze that often clouds the Grand Canyon and Zion National Park.

However, air pollution retrofitting is just one area of major expenditures expected for Reid Gardner. Others include the costs to expand the plant's surface dumps for toxic coal ash waste and the escalating costs for cleaning up the contaminated land and groundwater when the plant is finally retired.

There are also Southern Nevadans' ongoing health care costs from the respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses worsened by the plant's air pollutants which are not accounted for by NV Energy. These may be \$28 million a year, according to the Clean Air Task Force.

Second, Reid Gardner's capacity is not needed anymore. A recent report by Resource Insight Inc. finds that NV Energy could retire Reid Gardner's oldest three units this year and its fourth unit next year, and still have adequate and economical energy sources to power our homes and businesses.

That finding is based on additional solar and geothermal generation for NV Energy's system, more realistic estimates of the output from existing renewable resources, increased energy efficiency, the extension of the utility's contract with Las Vegas Cogeneration, and the new transmission line from northern Nevada, linking for the first time the Sierra Pacific and Nevada Power systems.

The analysts also conclude that "even with the retirement of 557 megawatts of Reid Gardner capacity, the Desert Southwest region would have far more surplus than Nevada Power would need, even if some renewable projects were delayed."

Summer capacity surplus in Southern California is in the range of 12,000 to 16,000 megawatts. Because Southern California is a large net purchaser of capacity from Nevada, NV Energy needs "could be met from local resources, without even requiring that the power be transmitted from California."

The families who live next door to Reid Gardner on the Moapa Indian Reservation don't need an expert to know that Reid Gardner's output isn't economical or necessary. They've seen firsthand that the plant was idled much of the winter.

Coal-burning power plants simply aren't very efficient. A typical coal plant converts only about 38 percent of its fuel into electricity. Reid Gardner fares worse, with only about 30 percent of its coal burn converted to electricity. Natural gas plants are more efficient and natural gas is expected to remain at low prices. Large scale renewables continue to decline in cost.

Finally, even while Reid Gardner was idled, its pollution continued. Toxic dust from the plant's coal ash waste landfill blows into the nearby Moapa Paiute community, and evidence indicates that the landfill leaches contaminants into groundwater near the Muddy River.

From an office in Las Vegas it may be easy to slow walk a decision to retire Reid Gardner and clean up its waste. But for the sake of the families who are harmed by the plant's ongoing pollution - and for sound stewardship of Nevadans' current and future rate dollars - this straightforward spring-cleaning decision must be made now.

Frankie Sue Del Papa served three terms as Nevada attorney general. Timothy Hay is the former consumer advocate for Nevada and a former member of the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada.

Find this article at:

<http://www.lvrj.com/opinion/out-with-the-old-151286695.html?ref=695>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © Stephen Media, LLC. All rights reserved. Any reproduction or distribution (except for personal, non-commercial purposes), in any form or by any means, without the express written consent of Stephens Media, LLC, is strictly prohibited.