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NRC Grants “Timely Renewal” Exemption to Allow Continued Operation of Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has [granted an exemption](#) to Pacific Gas & Electric Co. that would allow the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant to continue operating while the agency considers its license renewal application.

After evaluating the company’s exemption request, the NRC staff determined that the exemption is authorized by law, will not present undue risk to the public health and safety, and is consistent with the common defense and security. In addition, the staff determined Diablo Canyon’s continued operation is in the public interest because of serious challenges to the reliability of California’s electricity grid.

The current operating licenses for the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, Units 1 and 2, expire on Nov. 2, 2024, and Aug. 26, 2025, respectively. The exemption granted today will allow those licenses to remain in effect provided PG&E submits a sufficient license renewal application for the reactors by Dec. 31, 2023. The NRC will continue its normal inspection and oversight of the facility throughout the review to ensure continued safe operation. If granted, the license renewal would authorize continued operation for up to 20 years.

NRC regulations allow a reactor’s operating license to remain in effect beyond its expiration date contingent upon the licensee submitting a sufficient license renewal application at least five years prior to expiration – a status called “timely renewal.” PG&E requires the exemption because it has not met that five-year requirement.

PG&E applied to renew the licenses in November 2009 but withdrew the application in 2018 and announced plans to cease operations and decommission the reactors when the licenses expire. After California enacted legislation last September to support continued operation, PG&E asked the NRC to resume its review of the previous application. In January, the staff informed the company that it would need to submit a new, up-to-date renewal application. That made the current exemption necessary to allow continued operation while the application is under review.

PG&E has said it will submit an application by the end of this calendar year. The NRC’s review of a license renewal application typically lasts 22 months.