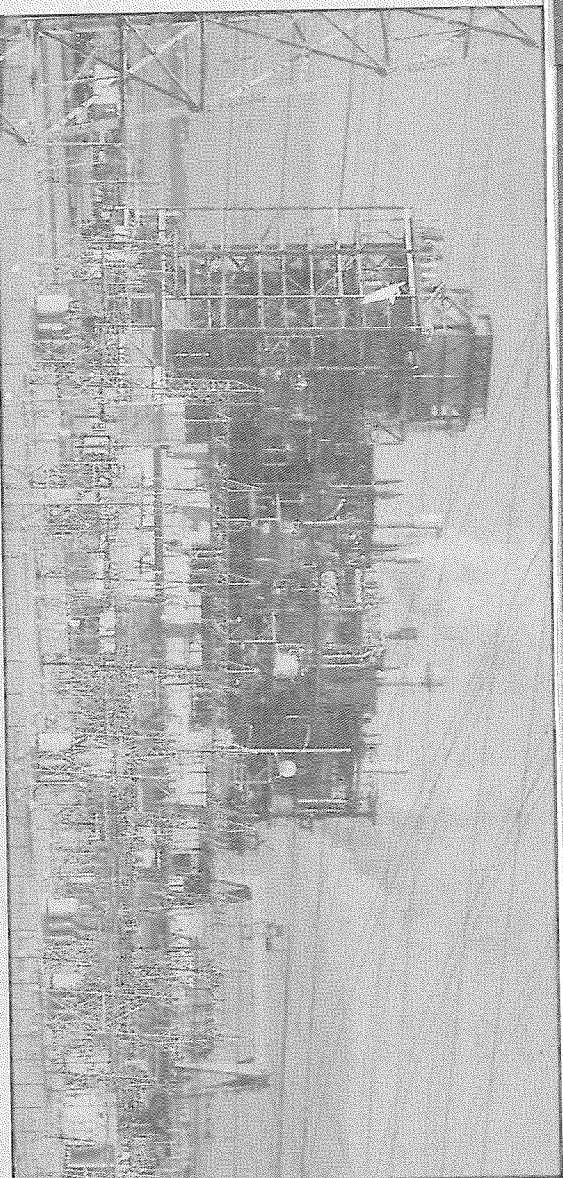


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The South Bay Power Plant in Chula Vista *John Gibbins/Union-Tribune*

Past time for power plant to go

By **Pamela Bensoussan**
and **Steve Castaneda**

Tuesday should have been a landmark day for South Bay communities and San Diego Bay. It should have been a day of celebration and speeches ushering in a new era of renewal for the Chula Vista bayfront. The South Bay Power Plant operator, the regional water quality authority and state energy agencies all promised that by November 10, 2009, the polluting clunker would have shut down its operation. Sadly, it did not happen.

Instead, the water discharge permit to cool the plant, slated to expire Tuesday, was indefinitely extended. In addition, the energy grid manager – the California Independent System Operator – persistently designates the plant with “must-run” status. Until this status is lifted, or the water permit is terminated, long-awaited plans for parks, hotels and economic development on the bayfront remain beyond reach.

As South Bay elected officials, we are united by our desire to remove the power plant from the Chula Vista bayfront. This antiquated plant impacts our health, economy and environment. Permitted for up to 600 tons of deadly particulate matter, its pollution contributes to unhealthy air quality that plagues our children and seniors. Its inefficient technology, emitting one million tons of greenhouse gasses annually, costs San Diego rate payers \$35 million a year – for power that doesn’t always stay in the region. It is a barrier to realizing our dreams of a beautiful bayfront and makes it impossible to attract quality

Bensoussan and **Castaneda** are co-chairs of the Chula Vista City Council Energy Subcommittee. This piece was co-signed by a dozen elected officials representing the South Bay.

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developers.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board’s own study shows that the plant’s use of San Diego Bay water kills billions of fish larvae and millions of sea creatures when operating at full capacity. The hot water discharge contaminated with pollution during 50 years of operations has fundamentally altered the marine ecosystem in the South Bay. Only removal of the power plant – and time – will heal the Bay.

We know there are better alternatives. This is a perfect time to focus our attention on new strategies to meet our energy needs in a way that is local, more reliable, more sustainable and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Developing a green energy economy is a high priority now for federal, state and local governments. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act has spurred unprecedented collaboration and innovation among diverse stakeholders in the energy field. Recent commitments of millions of dollars of stimulus funds will allow our region to finally get serious about reducing energy consumption, energy efficiency and renewable sources.

South Bay cities are working with SANDAG in applying for millions of dollars to start a regionwide, whole-house retrofit program with incentives and rebates. Clean Tech successfully helped cities, school districts, universities and other public agencies in San Diego County receive \$154 million for clean energy generation. SDG&E has committed to spending \$280 million over

three years on efficiency measures to achieve extraordinary energy savings.

We have waited and been reasonable, but our patience is running out. In 1999, the Port District, working with local elected officials, made a bold move to purchase the plant with the intent of tearing it down and returning the site to public use by 2010. The state provided \$15 million for the plant’s demolition at the end of the lease. The 10-year lease period allowed time for the bonds used for purchasing the plant to be paid off. The lease included conditions to assure that the lights stayed on in the South Bay. We are told by SDG&E that adequate energy generation and transmission are now in place to meet that goal. So what happened? The 10-year period expired Tuesday.

The Olay Mesa Energy Center of ficially went online October 3, providing replacement energy generation to the region. The Port bonds to purchase the power plant are paid off. In addition, many peaker plants have been sited in the South Bay since 1999. Using the California ISO’s and the state Energy Commission’s own formulas, our region has as much as 400 surplus megawatts without the South Bay Power Plant. Simply stated, this plant is no longer needed.

We are asking the Regional Water Quality Control Board to take action at its December meeting to quickly end the damaging use of bay water to cool the power plant. We are calling on the energy grid manager, the ISO, to eliminate the plant’s “must-run” designation. We are calling on the Port District to initiate actions to decommission the power plant.

So, Tuesday was not our day for celebration. But our day is coming. We – local elected officials, SDG&E, community members, business and environmental organizations – are united. It is time for the South Bay Power Plant to go.