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Dynegy power plant blown up in southern California

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CHULA VISTA, California (Reuters) - Thousands of spectators turned out along San Diego Bay on Saturday to watch as demolition crews consigned an aging and decommissioned Dynegy Inc power plant to the dustbin of history.

Forty rapid-fire blasts from strategically placed explosives toppled the 165-foot structure, as onlookers cheered and shock waves set off car alarms across a widespread area.

Most of the estimated 5,000 spectators gathered in Marina View Park in Chula Vista, about 1,000-feet north of the plant, for the early morning spectacle.

Often criticized by environmentalists as an eyesore, the plant was built in the late 1950s at the edge of an expanse of wetlands adjacent to the bay.

Like other plants along the California Coast, it burned oil when it was first fired up in 1960. It later converted to natural gas, according to Laura Hunter of the Environmental Health Coalition.

"This is a symbol of the past way of generating power which we know now is not sustainable," Hunter said. "There's no better symbol for what we're learning about how to live on this planet than that where a power plant stood, a park and open space will be built," she said.

It took several years of planning before officials could move ahead with the final demolition of the plant, according to Kristine Zortman, of the Unified Port of San Diego.

Apart from a slow-going permit process, the facility had to be stripped of asbestos and metal that could be recycled. Engineers also needed to weaken the structure to ensure that it would fall easily, Zortman said.

The demolition crew placed 200 pounds of detonating explosives and 300 pounds of dynamite throughout the structure. Before the blasts, eight water cannons filled the air with mist so dust would be trapped in condensation and fall to the ground, she said.

The detonations sent shock waves as far as half a mile away as the four towers toppled, leaving smokestacks sticking up at a rakish angle.

The city of Chula Vista has big plans for the site - including a hotel and convention center, with an adjoining site for campers and recreational vehicles, said Mayor Cheryl Cox.

"It wasn't always an ugly, useless object," Cox said. "It employed thousands of good people and delivered important energy to our communities. But it's good to see it go and make way for the future of our bayfront."

(Reporting by Marty Graham; Editing by Tom Brown and Gunna Dickson)



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