# US regulators approve new SCE & G nuke reactors

The Associated Press

For the second time in as many months, federal regulators on Friday approved plans by the nation's power companies to build new nuclear reactors to generate electricity.

During a brief meeting in Washington, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission voted 4-1 to allow South Carolina Electric & Gas to build two new 1,100-megawatt reactors at its V.C. Summer Nuclear Station in Jenkinsville near Columbia.

The project is only the second to receive federal approval in a generation. Last month, the commission voted to issue a permit to Atlanta-based Southern Co. to build and operate two new reactors at its Plant Vogtle site south of Augusta, Ga., the first such approval since 1978.

The South Carolina reactors will be jointly owned and operated with South Carolina's state-owned utility Santee Cooper. The first is expected to be on line by 2016; the second in 2019.

Kevin Marsh, the president and chief executive officer of SC&G said the company owns about 55 percent of the project that will cost around $10 billion. He said when the new units come on line, the company's power mix will be about one third coal, one third nuclear and one third natural gas.

"We still have a growing need for electricity in South Carolina," he said. "We needed something that was clean and reliable and non-emitting and that really comes down to nuclear power or natural gas in South Carolina. While wind and solar are appealing, we just don't have the capabilities to produce base load power from those sources."

"These new nuclear units are a critical component of Santee Cooper's long-term plan to diversify our generation mix," said Lonnie Carter, president and CEO of the state-owned utility.

As he did last month on the Plant Vogtle vote, NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko voted against the license.

He wants licenses to require all safety improvements presently being developed by the NRC staff based on what was learned in the nuclear accident at Fukushima, Japan, last year. The reactors in Japan and the ones licensed by the commission in the past two months are of similar design. The SCE&G license includes requirements for one of those improvements ordered after the Vogtle license was approved.

U.S. Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, called the vote "another victory for the nuclear industry's effort to avoid implementation of the safety upgrades recommended by the NRC's professional staff in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear meltdowns."

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Tom Clements of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability in Columbia said the reactor design makes it vulnerable in earthquakes and neither the Vogtle nor the Summer projects should continue until those safety concerns are addressed. The Friday licensing decision was hailed by the nuclear industry and criticized by a nuclear power opponent.

Marvin Fertel, the president and chief executive officer of the Nuclear Energy Institute said Friday's decision combined with the Plant Vogtle license will mean an additional 5,600 megawatts of nuclear generating capacity for the Southeast by the end of the decade.

"That's reliable, low-carbon electricity for about 10 cities the size of Columbia, S.C.," he said. Columbia has about 130,000 people.

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