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## **CPS Energy's plans cover many bases**

CPS Energy is earning well-deserved praise for its aggressive energy efficiency plan and move toward a solar plant.

A decision about whether to move forward with expanding the South Texas Project nuclear plant has been delayed for another nine months or more.

That delay is justified while costs, volatile economic conditions and the political winds of a new administration in Washington are sorted.

The utility hopes to save about 771 megawatts of power through an aggressive efficiency program between now and 2020, which should be enough to match the output of an additional power plant.

While the conservation effort will cost millions, officials told the Express-News that savings would be twice the costs.

The efficiencies will be gained through more lighting, insulation and other steps. Efficiency is the least expensive way to meet power demand.

CPS Energy officials also plan to build a solar plant that could produce as much as 100 megawatts. Renewable energy, mostly wind generated, is expected to account for 20 percent of the CPS portfolio by 2020.

The investment in renewable energy, while expensive, is key and likely will pave the way to future energy generation.

But the 800-megawatt gap between the utility's production/savings and the anticipated demand will require another power plant, according to current projections.

CPS Energy officials had planned to make a decision on whether to move ahead with nuclear expansion by this fall, but opted for delay.

Concerns over the huge cost estimates, which have been voiced aggressively behind the scenes by Mayor Phil Hardberger, are a key factor in the delay.

The nuclear industry also is anxiously waiting to see whether President-elect Barack Obama will adopt policy that pushes nuclear development or inhibits it.

“We have to keep nuclear open as an option for the next nine months to a year. That's our game plan,” said Milton Lee, the utility's CEO.

Major expenditures will be required in nine to 10 months.

Any move toward nuclear expansion will spark furious debate. Opponents are passionate.

Costs for a new plant are daunting and so far uncertain, but at the same time the city's earlier investment in nuclear power has helped keep electric rates for San Antonians inexpensive over the long term.

The delay offers the community more time to weigh the monumental decision.

That time should be put good use to ensure the decision is based on a thorough assessment of the facts.

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