



Exelon announces \$300M upgrade project

Jennifer DeWitt | Posted: Friday, March 5, 2010 9:30 pm

Exelon Nuclear's Quad-Cities Generating Station is embarking on a \$300 million improvement project expected to energize the local economy with nearly 2,100 temporary construction jobs and a payroll ranging from \$14 million to \$20 million.

In addition, the work will increase electricity production by the plant on the Mississippi River near Cordova, Ill.

During a news conference Friday, Exelon officials explained plans for the \$300 million power upgrade, which will be completed over two years beginning with a refueling outage this month.

Tim Tulon, the plant's site vice president, said the project entails the replacement of three low-pressure turbine rotors and casings on Unit 2. The rotors — which each weigh 124 tons — take steam from the reactors to turn the generator and produce electricity.

The same upgrade will be performed on Unit 1 in 2011. The work must be completed while the units are non-operational. Unit 1 will continue to produce electricity while the work is completed on Unit 2.

Each upgrade will cost \$150 million between the new equipment and the additional workers needed. Tulon added that the workers will complete the upgrade as well as conduct more than 13,000 other work activities as part of the refueling outage.

John Garrity, Exelon's work management director, estimated that the payroll for the project will range from \$14 million to \$20 million.

The turbine rotors, produced by Alstom, each cost between \$18 million and \$20 million. The equipment was built in France and Switzerland.

In addition to Exelon's 850-person work force, the project is expected to create nearly 2,100 temporary construction jobs across multiple trades. Tulon said the turbine work alone will require 300 workers.

Rory Washburn, the executive director of the Tri-City Building Trades Council, said the project is welcome news for the local trades unions. He estimated it will create 1,300 trades jobs and another 800 support jobs. To perform the upgrade and other work, the plant will hire millwrights, electricians, pipefitters, laborers, welders, iron workers, boilermakers, sheet metal workers and insulators.

"We're going to employ a lot of local labor," Tulon said.

Washburn said the project also is drawing skilled trades workers from across the country, including those who specialize in the nuclear industry. "There's a lot of people out there looking for work."

"This is outstanding," he said of the project's scope and timing, given the slowness in the construction industry. "About 1,000 Quad-City families are going to get paychecks as a result of this."

Scott Verschoore, business manager for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 145 and the council's president, estimated that work for electricians is off 25 to 40 percent right now. He said about 200 electricians, including 75 local workers, will be on the job. "Once this is over in April, I'll have 20 percent unemployment (among the electricians)."

While the nuclear plant regularly performs maintenance as part of a refueling — a project that brings in hundreds of additional workers — Exelon spokesman Bill Stoermer said the turbine retrofit project is one of the largest projects undertaken by the plant since it opened in 1972.

"When we replace these now, they will last until the end of the life of the plant in 2032," he added.

It is the first time the casings and rotors have been replaced as assemblies since the plant opened.

Garrity said some of the other new equipment, which has been arriving for the past three weeks, will replace 1950s-era technology. Technology at the Cordova plant, which opened in 1972, is based on 1950s and 1960s designs, he said.

"We'll be taking the plant from an analog system to a digital system. The whole evolution is exciting to us," he said, adding that the new design will allow for more energy production.

The upgrade at Cordova will allow the plant to create enough additional electricity to power 32,000 homes, Tulon said.

Garrity said the project has been in the planning stages for the past four years. The last two years have involved the upgrade's design, fabrication and delivery. The refueling outage begins March 15 and will last into April.

According to Tulon, Exelon is increasing production through efficiency and new technology as opposed to building new power plants. “Exelon’s strategy is to take the current fleet and improve it, digitize it and increase the power.”

He said the Quad-City plant is the first of three of Exelon’s U.S. plants slated for upgrade. Upgrades also are in the works for Dresden, Ill., and Peach Bottom, Pa.

All three are to be upgraded by 2016, Tulon said, adding that the increased power “will be the equivalent of a new power plant — at half the cost.”

The upgrade for Cordova, he said will add an additional 40 megawatts of electrical generation to each units capacity.

In addition to the actual jobs created by the project, Tulon said there is other economic impact from the hundreds of workers who travel and stay in the Quad-Cities for the project’s duration. Their presence, he said, helps area hotels, restaurants and other businesses.