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## **Guide to the San Diego Gas and Electric, Sundesert Nuclear Power Plant Collection**

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## Guide to the San Diego Gas and Electric, Sundesert Nuclear Power Plant Collection 1974/1980

Special Collections & University Archives

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### Overview of the Collection

**Collection Title:** San Diego Gas and Electric, Sundesert Nuclear Power Plant Collection

**Dates:** 1974-1980

**Bulk Dates:** 1976-1977

**Identification:** MS-0211

**Creator:** San Diego Gas and Electric

**Physical Description:** 10.17 linear ft

**Language of Materials:** English

**Repository:** Special Collections & University Archives

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### Historical Note:

The 1970s proved a pivotal period in California's history with nuclear power. The climate between nuclear power advocates and environmentalists was confrontational. While voters failed to pass a 1972 proposal placing a 5-year moratorium on nuclear plant construction, conservation and environmental groups worked throughout the decade to stop construction of several proposed plants, especially along the coast and near fault lines.

In 1975, Jerry Brown replaced Ronald Reagan as California's governor, and the California Committee for Nuclear Safeguards qualified Proposition 15 for the state ballot. This stringent proposition, which ultimately failed at the polls, would have prohibited licenses for any new power plants until public 'proof' of an effective radioactive waste disposal system was discovered.

In 1976, just before this measure failed at the polls, Governor Brown passed three nuclear safeguard laws; one of which included the provision that the Resources Conservation and Development Commission of California and the Legislature determine at least one method of disposing of radioactive waste material safely. Most utilities supported the laws in an attempt to ward off Proposition 15.

In 1972, San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) began planning a new nuclear energy facility for southern California. In 1975, the year before California's new safeguard laws were enacted, they purchased land for the plant, approximately 16 miles southwest of Blythe and 10 miles from the Colorado River. On February 17, 1976, SDG&E filed a notice of intent with the state's Resources Conservation and Development Commission to build the Sundesert Nuclear Plant (SNP). The proposal was the first submitted to California's new "one step" approval system, implemented in 1974.

SNP would provide electric power to customers within the service areas of SDG&E, who held a 50% interest in the project. The California Department of Water Resources, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the cities of Anaheim, Glendale, Pasadena, and Riverside also held interest in the project. The proposed plant would consist of two 950-megawatt nuclear generators, the first scheduled to go into service in 1985, and the second in 1988.

The need for the plant was almost immediately disputed, as well as its negative environmental impact, as its proposed creation encountered resistance from citizens, local governments, and state-wide government agencies. Several environmental issues were raised, in addition to the problem of nuclear waste disposal, including the presence of nearby fault lines.

While the state's Legislative Counsel argued that California's new nuclear safeguard laws unconstitutionally infringed upon the federal government's regulation of nuclear plant hazards, the SNP sought out legislative immunity to the new regulations. In mid-1977 Assemblyman Alister McAlister authored a bill that would potentially exempt SNP from California's 'de facto' ban on new atomic factory construction.

In December the state Resources Conservation and Development Commission, whose members had all been appointed by Governor Brown, gave preliminary approval to the proposed \$3 billion Sundesert project, but cut the plant's size in half and

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saddled it with numerous restrictions. The following month the same commission released a report that concluded all nuclear power plants were not safe because of their inability to dispose of radioactive waste. They urged the state legislature not to exempt SNP from the safeguard laws not because of any particular flaw or problem in the proposal, but because of waste disposal problems inherent to any and all nuclear energy facilities.

In January 1978, the California Senate voted 21 to 10 to exempt SNP from the state's nuclear safety laws, but the Democrat-controlled Assembly committee ultimately rejected the exemption due to persistent concerns regarding the potential dangers in storing nuclear waste. This decision marked the end of the Sundesert Nuclear Power project and was seen as a major turning point in the state's energy policy.

In 1983, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments regarding California's moratorium on new nuclear plant construction; *Pacific Gas & Electric v. State Energy Resources Conservation & Development Commission*. This was a direct challenge to the 1976 statute that prohibited construction of new nuclear plants in the state until adequate storage facilities and means of disposal for nuclear waste were determined.

Two California utilities and the federal government argued that the Atomic Energy Act gives the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission sole authority to regulate nuclear power plant construction and operation. Interestingly, the Court sided with the state of California based on economic and land use issues, rather than on protection from radiological hazards, stating that while the federal government oversees health and safety matters, the states may regulate nuclear power on an economic basis.

**Access Terms**

This collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Corporate Name:**

San Diego Gas and Electric Company -- Archives

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

**Genre/Form of Material:**

Organizational Records

**Topical Term:**

Environmental impact analysis -- California, Southern

Environmental law -- California

Environmental law -- California.

Environmentalism

Environmentalism -- California, Southern

Nuclear energy -- California

Nuclear energy -- California.

Nuclear energy -- Law and legislation -- California

Nuclear power plants -- California, Southern

Nuclear regulation -- California.

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**Preferred Citation:**

Identification of item, folder title, box number, San Diego Gas and Electric, Sundesert Nuclear Power Plant Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, Library and Information Access, San Diego State University.

**Arrangement of Materials:**

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- I. State and Local Government Records, 1976-78
  - II. Federal Government Records, 1974-78
  - III. Research and Development Files and Publications, 1976-77

#### **Scope and Contents**

The *Sundesert Nuclear Power Plant Collection* documents SDG&E's attempt to build the Sundesert nuclear power facility, as well as the California State Resources Conservation and Development Commission's actions in response to that proposal. The collection dates from 1974-1980, with the bulk of documents generated in 1976 and 1977, the months and years immediately following the plant's formal proposal. The collection consists of legal documents, state and federal government records, correspondence, and research files. It has been divided into three major series: State and Local Government Records, Federal Government Records, and Research and Development Files and Publications.

The State and Local Government Records document the intense interaction between the Sundesert Project and the state of California, primarily via the California State Resources Conservation and Development Commission, chaired by Richard L. Maullin. Documents in this series consist of reports, notices of intention, correspondence, subpoenas, legal briefs, official statements, and petitions produced both before and during the state's official review of SDG&E's Sundesert proposal, dating between 1976 and 1978. Major subjects covered include the proposed plant's capacity, its environmental impacts, the legal ramifications of its construction, the inner workings of the Commission, and its interaction both with SDG&E and with many of the communities potentially affected by the plant's construction. This series is labeled by date and filed chronologically.

The Federal Government Records document the somewhat limited role of the federal government throughout the plant proposal period, particularly of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Documents in this series consist of relevant excerpts from the *Federal Register*, standard review plans, reports, evaluations, and site reviews for several potential sites produced both before and after the formal proposal for plant construction, between 1974-78. This series is labeled by date and field chronologically.

The Research and Development Files and Publications document the preparation work that SDG&E completed before formally filing its application with the California State Energy Commission. It includes published and unpublished reports generated both by SDG&E and by the Stone & Webster Engineering Corporation, Econometric Research Associates, and the Economic Sciences Corporation, all organizations hired by SDG&E to assist in early research and development. Records in this series were produced between 1976 and 77. They are labeled by date and filed chronologically.

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Box 1, Folder 6	<b>September 1-10 1976</b>
Box 2, Folder 1	<b>September 10-30 1976</b>
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Box 3, Folder 1	<b>October 18-31 1976</b>
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Box 3, Folder 5	<b>October 18-31 1976</b>
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Box 4, Folder 4	<b>November 1-11 1976</b>
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Box 5, Folder 1	<b>November 11-December 6 1976</b>
Box 5, Folder 2	<b>November 11-December 6 1976</b>

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Box 5, Folder 3	<b>November 11-December 6 1976</b>
Box 5, Folder 4	<b>November 11-December 6 1976</b>
Box 5, Folder 5	<b>November 11-December 6 1976</b>
Box 6, Folder 1	<b>December 6-14 1976</b>
Box 6, Folder 2	<b>December 6-14 1976</b>
Box 6, Folder 3	<b>December 6-14 1976</b>
Box 6, Folder 4	<b>December 6-14 1976</b>
Box 6, Folder 5	<b>December 6-14 1976</b>
Box 7, Folder 1	<b>December 15-31 1976</b>
Box 7, Folder 2	<b>December 15-31 1976</b>
Box 7, Folder 3	<b>December 15-31 1976</b>
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Box 7, Folder 5	<b>January 1977</b>
Box 8, Folder 1	<b>February 2-7 1977</b>
Box 8, Folder 2	<b>February 2-7 1977</b>
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Box 8, Folder 4	<b>February 8, 1977</b>
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Box 9, Folder 1	<b>February 8-24 1977</b>
Box 9, Folder 2	<b>February 8-24 1977</b>
Box 9, Folder 3	<b>February 25 - March 31, 1977</b>
Box 9, Folder 4	<b>February 25 - March 31, 1977</b>
Box 9, Folder 5	<b>ca. March - April 14 1977</b>
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Box 10, Folder 2	<b>April 14-25 1977</b>
Box 10, Folder 3	<b>April 14-25 1977</b>
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Box 10, Folder 5	<b>May 2 1977</b>
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Box 11, Folder 2	<b>May 2 1977</b>
Box 11, Folder 3	<b>May 2 1977</b>
Box 11, Folder 4	<b>May 3-20 1977</b>
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Box 15, Folder 4	<b>June 17-25 1977</b>
Box 15, Folder 5	<b>June 17-25 1977</b>
Box 15, Folder 6	<b>June 17-25 1977</b>
Box 16, Folder 1	<b>June 27 - July 7 1977</b>
Box 16, Folder 2	<b>June 27 - July 7 1977</b>
Box 16, Folder 3	<b>June 27 - July 7 1977</b>
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**Federal Government Documents 1974-78**

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Box 20, Folder 1           **June 1 - ca. 1977**  
Box 20, Folder 2           **January 1978**  
Box 20, Folder 3           **Volume 1, October 1978**  
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Box 21, Folder 1           **October 1974 - October 1975**  
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**Research and Development Files and Publications 1976-77**

Box 22, Folder 1           **October, 1976 - April 1977**  
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