

Op-ed published June 26<sup>th</sup> in Ross Valley Reporter

## **PG&E IS TOO RISKY, COSTLY**

by Barbara George

“Too Costly and Too Risky” has been the battle cry from Pacific Gas and Electric whenever the investor-owned utility has been challenged by cities and counties that want to take charge of their own energy decisions and advance green energy. (See the article in Sacramento News & Review: *PG&E’s Playbook*:

<http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/Content?oid=44248>)

**In reality, PG&E *itself* is too costly and too risky.**

In Marin County, we have an opportunity to forge forward for the benefit of our children’s future and the present generation by establishing Marin Clean Energy. *MCE will offer 50% or more renewable energy (solar, wind) at low, stable rates.* MCE rates will be initially the same as PG&E’s, but will drop lower within a few years because of several factors. Most renewable power requires no fuel.

Each of eleven city councils in Marin are holding meetings throughout this summer and fall, to consider whether to join together with the county in this historic venture. It’s important that Marin residents attend these public meetings and contact their elected officials to let them know they care.

MCE offers the residents and businesses of Marin County a choice of energy providers, thanks to the Community Choice law passed in 2002, which allows local communities to buy energy direct from wholesale providers rather than having to wait for PG&E to get around to buying the type of energy we want.

***Women’s Energy Matters supports MCE because it empowers our whole county to go green together.*** The power of working together as a community to green our energy system is immense; MCE will produce a far greater reduction in greenhouse gas emissions than anything else the County, the City, or we as individuals can do. MCE offers substantial economic benefits as well, through construction of local renewable power and greater energy efficiency.

WEM is one of only four or five public interest parties (“intervenors”) in key energy cases at the California Public Utilities Commission (since 2001). We have studied what PG&E is telling the regulators, which is very different from what it says in its paid advertising, or what it tells our elected officials at study sessions for Marin Clean Energy.

The gravity of gathering information for one’s self is imperative, especially in a climate where PG&E’s publicity machine is bombarding Marin residents with ads in newspapers,

on the Internet, radio and television and in their bills touting their new found-green religion. Consider these facts:

- ***PG&E is too costly and too risky.*** Can we afford to stay with a company that constantly raises rates, because of occurrences it failed to foresee? PG&E recently told regulators it wants big rate increases this year and next because of what it calls “unexpected increases in the price of natural gas and higher than expected electricity sales.” The smallest users would pay \$2.25 a month more, and many residential customers would see increases of \$17.00 a month.

PG&E is a monopoly and makes decisions according to the interests of its shareholders. By contrast, Marin Clean Energy’s responsibility is only to its customers. Non-profit, publicly-owned energy systems in Sacramento and Palo Alto offer rates that are as much as 40% lower than PG&E.

PG&E wastes millions of dollars every year, trying to deny local citizens the right to withdraw from its system to establish Community Choice or municipal power.

- ***PG&E is too costly and too risky.*** Can we afford to trust a company that went bankrupt — twice (in 2001 and 2003) — because it insisted on holding on to its investments in coal power outside California, including the dirtiest coal power plants in New England? PG&E’s involvement in the energy crisis was extremely costly to taxpayers as well as ratepayers. Soon after it lost its coal plants, PG&E opportunistically declared itself “green.”

- ***PG&E is too costly and too risky.*** Can we afford to stay with a company that bends the truth? PG&E congratulates itself, saying fifty percent of its energy is “green” — yet almost half of that is from nuclear power plants. Should we believe PG&E’s “corporate speak” when it claims it is environmentally conscious while utilizing nuclear power as almost half of its so-called “green” energy?

PG&E’s CEO stated that the company wants to explore additional nuclear investments. PG&E also plans to build an expensive pipeline to Oregon, hoping to import dangerous, explosive and corrosive Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The proposed LNG terminal on the pristine coast of Oregon is highly controversial.

**In fact, only 13% of PG&E’s energy qualifies as renewable, under the State’s careful definition of renewable energy.** The company told regulators it will miss the state’s target of 20% by 2010, however PG&E stated to Marin Co. Supervisors, “The company expects to meet California’s requirement for 20% renewables...” without admitting that it was falling behind the mandatory deadline by two to three years.

**PG&E’s refusal to move faster into renewable energy leaves us vulnerable to price increases from increased fuel costs.** Natural gas prices have more than doubled in the last few years. Hydroelectric output is suffering because of drought conditions. PG&E’s aging nuclear plant is subject to increases in fuel costs as well as catastrophic accidents.

• ***PG&E is too costly and too risky.*** Can we afford to believe a company that spent over \$50 million in marketing and PR in the past two years to toot its own horn about its energy efficiency programs? PG&E demanded 30% profits on energy efficiency; regulators granted 12% profits even though PG&E achieved less than half of its energy savings goals in recent years.

***PG& E is too costly and too risky.*** Should we trust our children's health to PG&E, the only utility that starred as the villain in a movie, *Erin Brockovich*? Here in San Rafael, residents are still at risk from the environmental contamination caused by PG&E's old gas plant at Second and Lindero. The company did a partial cleanup of the site in the 1980s, but it did not pass inspection for the property to be used for low-income housing. Another part of the site was never cleaned up. PG&E is only now starting testing in that area to see how badly the land and the groundwater have been polluted.

If PG&E persists with its costly public relations campaign, the public should be aware that the emperor, who has declared his wardrobe green, is parading through the county naked. We can't afford to believe corporate fairy tales that will yield nightmares for us now and for future generations.

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