

Support builds for Fresno County nuclear plant

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By John Ellis / The Fresno Bee

Undeterred by the nuclear crisis in Japan, backers of a proposed Fresno County nuclear plant are pushing ahead -- with the most recent blessing from the Madera County Board of Supervisors.

John Hutson, CEO of the Fresno Nuclear Energy Group, said a nuclear power plant built today would be far safer than the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, where workers are trying to prevent three nuclear reactors from melting down.

On Tuesday, the Madera County Board of Supervisors agreed, voting unanimously to draft a letter of support for the project. In January, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors approved a similar letter. Phil Larson, chairman of the Fresno County board, said Tuesday his position has not changed.

"Accidents happen. That's an old plant (in Japan). Containment of nuclear material today is much better than it used to be," Larson said.

With that support in hand, Hutson now plans to seek the backing of supervisors in Kings, Tulare and Merced counties.

The tragedy in northeastern Japan was on the minds of some Madera supervisors Tuesday, even as they supported the Fresno County project.

"Is it the proper time to even get into a discussion?" Supervisor Max Rodriguez asked.

But most of the five supervisors did just that.

"Those plants were made years back," Supervisor Ronn Dominici said. "This plant will be state of the art."

Supervisor David Rogers said a plant would be good for the region's economy and would help wean the nation off its reliance on foreign energy.

"I have a comfort level with the technology," he said.

Hutson said planners have found better ways to build the plants since the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant was commissioned in 1971. In addition, he said, the plants are different styles.