

# Plan for Fresno Co. nuclear plant faces obstacles

## Several hurdles remain for proposed site in western Fresno Co.

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By John Ellis and Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Local investors hoping to build a nuclear power plant in western Fresno County have scoped out locations, planned a water supply, lined up support and signed a development agreement with a French energy conglomerate.

The real hard work, however, lies ahead.

The hurdles are enormous and include arranging billions of dollars in financing, figuring out how to ship spent nuclear fuel from the Valley to France and navigating a state moratorium on new plants.

Add in a skittish public that is watching the nuclear crisis in Japan following an earthquake and tsunami, and the obstacles might prove insurmountable.

Safety shouldn't be a concern, said John Hutson, CEO of the Fresno Nuclear Energy Group. The proposed Fresno County nuclear power plant would use the latest technology and benefit from decades of advancements in the field, he said.

The plans for energy production include two 1,600-megawatt nuclear reactors as well as 800 megawatts of solar thermal power that would help pump needed water to the site.

Planned by Areva, a French firm that is one of the world's leading developers of nuclear power plants, it would -- if built -- be the largest nuclear power plant in California. Reactors now in operation at two other nuclear plants, Diablo Canyon in San Luis Obispo County and San Onofre in northern San Diego County, began generating power in the 1980s. Both are on the coast.

Hutson said the proposed Fresno County plant would be far safer than the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant in Japan, where workers have been battling desperately to prevent three nuclear reactors from melting down. The threat in Japan included overheating spent fuel in four ponds near reactors.

Hutson's group plans to ship the Fresno County plant's used nuclear fuel rods to a recycling facility in France, which would eliminate the need to find a long-term disposal site in the U.S. The lack of safe, long-term disposal sites has led to California's 34-year moratorium on new nuclear power plants.