

# State

## DP&L may be too wealthy for \$81.7 million rate hike

United Press International  
DALLAS — A Boston energy research organization under contract to a Dallas consumer group says Dallas Power & Light Co. is too sound fiscally to be allowed to bill its customers for construction costs at the Comanche Peak nuclear power plant.

DP&L is seeking an \$81.7 million rate hike before the Public Utility Commission in Austin. The Dallas chapter of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now has intervened to block the utility's rate hike request.

Boston-based Energy Systems Research Group criticized DP&L's rate hike request on ACORN's behalf, following a study of the utility. The rate hike request includes a DP&L proposal to bill its customers for construction costs arising from the unfinished Comanche Peak plant in Glen Rose, Texas.

ACORN has charged that roughly 75 percent of the proposed rate hike — about \$60.5 million — would amount to a customer "bailout" for DP&L's share of a \$1.5 billion cost overrun at Comanche Peak.

State law permits the PUC to allow construction costs to be included in a utility's rate base when it is necessary to the company's financial integrity.

But Energy Systems Research Group economist Neil H. Talbot contended DP&L's financial position was not only sound but well above average for an electric utility, making the company ineligible to collect construction costs.

DP&L spokesman Jim Lawrence agreed Monday the company was on solid financial footing but said officials could not be sure how it would be rated in the current market.

Talbot also criticized DP&L's continued participation in the Comanche Peak project because the company already maintains substantial power-generating reserves. He said DP&L's own pre-filed testimony indicated that even on the peak demand day during the summer's heat wave, the utility could still generate 42 percent more power than its customers were using.

Lawrence defended the utility's reserve capability, saying it was a temporary situation that would ease in the 1980s once older natural gas-fired generating plants were phased out in favor of newer lignite plants.

"Our reserves have risen during our conversion program (from natural gas and oil to lignite)," he said. "As the new lignite plants come into operation, they are considered part of our capacity. As the older gas units become more inefficient to run, we'll be retiring those units."

Talbot disagreed with DP&L's statement that advance payment from customers for ongoing construction lowers the overall cost of completed facilities.

Using a computer model developed by his firm, Talbot predicted DP&L customers could expect to pay as much as \$27 million extra during the projected life of Comanche Peak if DP&L is allowed to add the plant's cost of construction in progress to its rate base.

Lawrence disagreed, saying, "It would cause higher rates at this time but would result in a lower overall cost of the plant."

## Air Force eyes sites of missiles

United Press International  
WASHINGTON — The Air Force announced Tuesday it would identify the potential area support centers for the MX missile system in its upcoming draft environmental impact statement due to be released later this month.

Ten communities are under consideration to become support centers, including areas near Dalhart and Hereford, Texas; Portales, N.M.; Tonopah, Ely, Eureka and Pioche, Nev.; and Delta and Milford, Utah.

The total number of support centers to be selected is dependent on where the MX system is deployed, and ranges from three to six centers. A final decision on how many will be required will be made next year, said MX public affairs officer Mike Terrill.

Terrill said the area support centers would provide facilities for equipment storage and repairs, security control, maintenance dispatch, helicopter transport and maintenance, and other on-site services necessary to maintain support of the MX missile system.

He said military personnel would be on temporary duty from a main operating base for periods up to seven days. The remaining personnel would be civilians hired from adjacent communities.

MX is a new intercontinental ballistic missile system being developed by the Air Force to help upgrade the nation's nuclear defense forces. Plans call for it to consist of 200 missiles spread throughout 4,600 shelters. It is expected to be operational by the end of 1989.

Talbot also charged DP&L had ignored the use of conservation to supplement or replace power plant construction.

"In my opinion, it is incumbent on any utility management engaged in a major construction program to reevaluate the comparative economics of nuclear power and other sources, with particular emphasis on conser-

vation as a major source of power," Talbot said.

Lawrence said conservation already has had some effect on DP&L customers but that conservation alone would not be enough.

"The energy is going to have to be there," he said. "Although conservation will help, we can't just sit idly by and expect conservation to do it all."

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