



Fast Facts

Southern Company's Plant Vogtle, on the Savannah River, was initially proposed to have four units, and was projected to cost \$660 million in the mid-1970's. When it was completed 15 years later, two units cost almost \$9 billion. The cost increased to 27 times the initial estimate.

Estimates for the cost of two new reactor power units at Plant Vogtle, as late as 2006, were as low as \$3 billion. Today the estimated cost is \$14 billion. Before any construction work has been completed, estimated costs increased almost 5 times in only two years. If there are no delays, the two new units should enter service in 2016 and 2017, a full eight years from now.

In December 2007, Florida Power and Light estimated the cost of two new nuclear units at its Turkey Point Power Plant at \$24 billion.

The U.S. Congressional Budget Office, in May 2008, reported that the actual costs of building the last 75 nuclear units in the US increased by 300% over their estimated costs. The initial estimate was \$45.2 billion and the final bill was \$144.6 billion (1990 dollars).

For More Information:
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Use Power Produced in Georgia for Georgians

What's at Stake?

Georgia's state government has been reluctant to implement policies that address the fact of climate change. The impacts caused by that change may already be apparent in contemporary weather patterns of drought cycles punctuated by stormy weather. As the impacts grow, from rising sea levels to stronger tropical storms to even more prolonged drought, the costs to the state and its residents are rising. At the same time, comprehensive federal policies designed to reduce human activities that worsen climate change are going to be implemented in Georgia, even if our state government does nothing.

One fact is common among all responses and proposed responses to climate change: all are aimed at reducing atmospheric carbon accumulation, the human activity most widely credited with causing the planet to grow warmer. A bewildering variety of ways to reduce the amount of carbon humans put in the atmosphere have been proposed. This carbon is largely the product of the combustion of fossil fuels, which means that the carbon is being taken from its repository in the earth, used in part for energy, and then allowed to become a greenhouse gas in the air.

Some plans concentrate on substituting fuels that emit less atmospheric carbon than others. This explains the relative advantage of natural gas. Others seek to use non-fossil fuels, hence the emphasis on cellulosic ethanol and bio-diesel. Still another strategy would substitute other sources of energy for carbon-based fuels, and wind, biomass and solar power seem to be the favored technologies.

A separate approach to reducing carbon that has been successful in some places, but in which Georgia has been slow to action, is to simply use less electricity. California has cut its use of electricity by 30% over the last 20 years, and has still accommodated record economic and population growth by using its savings to meet those needs.

Challenges

Georgia's carbon footprint, the amount of carbon the state emits from smokestacks, tailpipes and forest fires, is not entirely due to meeting Georgia's energy needs. Since 1980, Georgia has produced electricity from burning coal that has served users on a firm or guaranteed basis in other states, predominately Florida.

Georgia can freeze its current carbon footprint, and perhaps even minimize it over the short term by simply ending the practice of supplying firm electric power to customers outside Georgia. The power suppliers in those states are perfectly capable of meeting their customers' needs and Georgia has sacrificed air and water quality for them for 30 years already.

Next Steps

Plant Scherer, a coal plant near Macon, is owned by Georgia utilities except for Unit 4, which is owned by Florida Power Company and Jacksonville Electric Authority. Georgia utilities need to buy that plant before they build any expensive new coal or nuclear plants. Georgia Power has long term firm power sales contracts with out of state utilities. It could be in our state's best interest to retire those contracts if Georgians need the power.