

HEAL Utah Hosts Forum On Small Nuclear Reactors In Response To Upcoming Project



As Heber Light and Power has signed on to participate in what's known as the Carbon Free Power Project, a watchdog group wants to have a community discussion about the potential effects of the small nuclear reactor that will power the system.

Environmental and public health advocacy group HEAL Utah is hosting a community forum in Heber City Wednesday to discuss the impact of small, modular nuclear reactors, like the one being developed in southern Idaho by the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems, or UAMPS. Heber Light and Power is one local utility buying into the project, looking to provide energy to ratepayers through a low-carbon alternative.

HEAL Utah grassroots organizer Noah Miterko says the project, in the organization's view, is a continuation of a harmful nuclear legacy in the western United States.

"This project will produce a huge amount of high-level waste, which is our main concern, and also it looks to be incredibly expensive for ratepayers," Miterko said. "So, we want to make sure that Heber Light and Power

ratepayers aren't paying more than they have to. And we would love to see the utility and others invest in affordable, renewable energy that's available now, rather than continuing this nuclear legacy."

Nuclear power plants have seen success in other parts of the world. The International Atomic Energy Agency reports that France's 58 nuclear power plants generate more than 70% of the country's electricity. Miterko argues the U.S. hasn't seen that same success with nuclear because it's expensive to build and there's no solution to storing and disposing of waste.

"We can't recycle the waste in the United States in the similar ways that they can in Europe, mostly for national security concerns," Miterko said. "And the problems that exist in Europe would exist over here, too. When it gets too hot, they have to shut those down. They use huge amounts of water, and this is a very water-sensitive area. The Idaho National Lab is on the Snake River aquifer, and this would take huge amounts of water for that, and then that goes to affect everybody downstream in communities like Northern Utah."

A [press release from UAMPS](#) says its small modular nuclear reactor project would be smaller, safer and less expensive than older nuclear reactors. Heber Light and Power General Manager Jason Norlen says the project is in its beginning phases, and Heber Light and Power has been monitoring the economic viability of the project, comparing it to other power source options.

"As far as rates go, we've got a couple of coal plants in our portfolio that are coming off line in the next decade, and whenever you shift like that, there's going to be some rate impact," Norlen said. "Maybe technology will be invented that will make renewables the answer, but right now we have a lot of renewables in our portfolio—they're very up and down. They're very sporadic, and we're using natural gas now to back them up."

Heber Light and Power services 13,000 customers in the Heber Valley.

Norlen says the small modular nuclear reactor is just one of many power purchase agreements, or PPAs, the local utility is looking into to diversify their energy portfolio.

"We just recently signed on for a life plant PPA for a solar farm down at the Navajo Nation that's going to come online in 2022," Norlen said. "We just recently did a 14-year PPA with a geothermal plant and solar plant in Nevada. So, you know, this is just one project. We're just looking at this project to replace our coal."

[HEAL Utah's event](#) discussing small modular nuclear reactors is Wednesday, Aug. 7 at 6:30 p.m. at the Heber City Police Department.