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# Knockdown phase at Cameo power plant

By [Charles Ashby](#)

Monday, August 15, 2011

Cameo power plant manager Charles Houge is going down with his ship.

As one of only two men left at the recently shuttered coal-fired power plant along the Colorado River in De Beque Canyon, Houge's job now is to make sure everything is set for its eventual decommissioning.

The dismantling of the 1,100-acre plant, which ceased operations at the end of last year, will start next week. Its owner, Xcel Energy, is to announce today the out-of-state company that won the contract to tear it down.

But because of its age, environmental cleanup and safety concerns for demolition workers, that work will take some time, said Fred Eggleston, Xcel's local community service manager.

"It takes a very specialized company to do that and only a few are qualified," Eggleston said. "Not just anybody can do it. The company that wins the decommissioning contract has to have a stellar safety record. I mean flawless. Safety is what it's all about."

Starting next week and for the next year to 18 months, Interstate 70 motorists driving by will see less and less of the 50-year-old icon that once employed 35 workers.

There are only a handful of companies in the world that are qualified to decommission a coal-fired power plant such as Cameo, so the general contractor to do that job likely won't be local, said Rep. Laura Bradford, R-Collbran, who's been working closely with the company on the plant's decommissioning and the future of its site.

Still, Xcel has assured her that when that company gets started, it will hire subcontractors to do some of the work, and many of those jobs will go to local workers, she said.

"I have been preaching and whining for six to eight months about that," Bradford said. "I've told them the need for local jobs, and they've assured me they will focus on that. I'm pretty sure we have plenty of skilled people locally who can do a lot of the work."

The company is expected to hire up to 50 people right away to do asbestos abatement, Eggleston said. Not only does the facility have plenty of it in its insulation, but in some of the interior paint, too.

In a couple more weeks, Xcel is expected to announce the relocation of the solar panels there, too.

Those panels actually belong to a Spanish company, Abengoa Solar, that maintains a research and development office in the newly opened Solar Technology Acceleration Center in Aurora.

Last year, that company partnered with Xcel to use Cameo to conduct an experiment to see if solar power could be used to augment electricity generation at a coal-fired power plant. That experiment had limited success, said Xcel spokesman Gabriel Romero.

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### Emissions reduced

The first-of-its-kind experiment, called a solar trough, was designed to heat water before it reached the plant's boiler, reducing the amount of coal needed to do that job. To generate power, water is boiled into steam that is used to spin a turbine, which turns a generator that creates electricity. Normally, water is heated solely by burning coal.

It worked, but only to a point. It didn't generate the thermal energy Abengoa had expected, and wasn't as cost-effective as Xcel had hoped, according to Xcel's final report on the experiment.

Still, the nearly yearlong experiment saved the plant from having to burn 260 tons of coal, which reduced its emissions by about 600 tons of carbon dioxide, 2,000 pounds of nitrogen oxides and 5,400 pounds of sulfur dioxides, the report said.

The solar panels and equipment for the experiment, which took up six acres adjacent to the plant, are to be moved to Aurora, possibly for use in another experiment, Romero said.

"They'll be taking it over to SolarTAC in Aurora," he said. "They have several things going on over there. There are several companies (at SolarTAC) and a lot of it is experimental stuff."

### Buyer for site?

As for what will happen with the facility after it is decommissioned, Romero can't say.

He said Xcel is fielding several ideas, adding that however it is used, it will benefit the Grand Valley in jobs and economic development.

"There's obviously people who are interested in the plant, and there are several ideas on the table, but we haven't made any decisions at all on what will happen there," Romero said. "The person that's in charge of that from Xcel's standpoint has a pretty rigid expectation of that plant. He can't just say, 'OK, the highest bidder or whatever the case may be.' It has to have certain components, like providing jobs to the city of Grand Junction. There's a whole list of things going into that decision. The bottom line is, it's going to be put to good use."

Some of the items used during the half-century life of the facility already have been put to use, Houge said.

Several items, such as a 1900s-era coal car, an old clock, pictures and other memorabilia, already have been moved to the Wyman Living History Museum in Craig.

"Craig is an old coal mining town, so it fits that they would want that stuff," said Houge, who has run Cameo since 1992 and officially will retire at the end of November. "I'm glad it's being put to good use."

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