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Xcel Officials Want to Shut Down Cameo Power Plant

As part of its new eight year plan, Xcel Energy announced it plans on shutting down the Cameo Power Plant by the end of 2010. But what does this closure mean to workers and Western Slope Xcel customers?

The Cameo Power Plant has operated in Mesa County since 1957. Fifty years later, Xcel says it's time to retire.

It says the coal-fired plant isn't as efficient as many others across the state, producing only 77 megawatts of energy. It also says closing the plant will help reduce carbon emissions.

But what does this mean for the 35 employees who show up to work there everyday? Xcel officials say many of the employees will be ready to retire by the time the plant shuts down, and those who can still work will be transferred to other plants.

As far as the impact on Xcel customers is concerned, officials made it very clear during a meeting Friday morning that prices would not go up because of renewable energy initiatives included in their new plan. But their answers weren't so clear when they were asked about normal rates.

"That still leaves the increases that could happen in the other types of enery produced -- the non-renewables," said Mesa County Commissioner Janet Rowland. "Is that where we're going to see an increase in our rates?"

The company says it has to assess business costs like labor, technology, and energy source prices before they propose if rates will go up or down.

Then there's the question, where will Western Colorado get its power from?

"We are going to provide adequate resources for all of our customers," said Xcel Energy Regional VP Riley Hill. "Not just the customers in Denver and not just the customers in any one sector of the state."

Finally, what will happen to the site itself? At this point, Xcel officials say they don't know.

"It's a very good site and location," said Hill. "We will work with all of our communities to look at options."

They County says it has an idea that they will work with company to implement.

"It appears that Xcel is replacing its coal plants with natural gas plants," said Rowland. "It seems like it makes a lot of sense to have that type of plant here, right in the middle of where the natural gas drilling is happening."

Before the plant can be officially closed, Xcel must get its plan approved by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission.

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