Humboldt Bay officially decommissioned, site released

The license for Pacific Gas & Electric Company’s Humboldt Bay Unit 3 nuclear power plant near Eureka, Calif., has been terminated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the site has been released for unrestricted use. A 65-MWe boiling water reactor plant, Humboldt Bay-3 operated commercially from 1963 to 1976.

After decommissioning the facility to meet the NRC’s radiation protection standards, PG&E in October 2021 submitted final status surveys of the Unit 3 site and requested license termination. The NRC said that its staff evaluated the surveys, conducted inspections, and reviewed confirmatory analyses before concluding that the site meets its criteria for license termination for unrestricted use. The NRC issued a safety evaluation report on November 18, 2021, in response to PG&E’s request to terminate the Humboldt Bay-3 license.

Humboldt Bay was unique in that the reactor core was situated in a watertight, 60-foot-diameter concrete caisson buried 80 feet below grade. The caisson was a first of its kind to house a nuclear containment structure, pressure suppression chamber, and nuclear steam supply system underground. While the caisson made decommissioning the site challenging, crews were able to remove the structure by 2018.