

Board vote on Lockheed may not serve purpose

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Protests aimed at stopping Lockheed's production of a Trident II Missile component at its Bonny Doon plant may end up creating the opposite result.

Lockheed's "strongest option," now that the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has denied a grading permit to expand the Lockheed facility, is to convert the existing plant to produce only the controversial part, according to Vern Smith, the plant's resident director.

"It sort of defeats their mission in a way," Smith said of the protesters. "The work they don't mind is leaving, and the work they don't like (is) staying — and more of it."

No decision has been made, but if that option is taken, some employees and equipment at the Bonny Doon facility could be switched to Lockheed's Sunnysvale location.

The Bonny Doon plant, currently employing 370 people, would be devoted to production

of the component under a U.S. Navy contract. The part, which looks something like a length of electric cable, is a small explosive device used to separate stages of a rocket in flight.

Shifting operations would be a simple way of dealing with the county's denial of a permit to grade 14,600 cubic yards of soil for construction of a 31,000-square-foot manufacturing building, Smith indicated.

The Board of Supervisors' 3-2 decision followed a five-hour hearing in the Santa Cruz High School auditorium Jan. 8. About 30 people out of a crowd of 400 spoke, with the bulk of testimony against Lockheed.

Chairman Gary Patton, Robley Levy and Joe Cucchiara voted against the permit. Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore voted for it.

Though supervisors said they based their decisions on land-use issues, much of the testimony was a repeat of the planning commission's hearing Nov. 28, in which the nuclear issue prevailed and the same decision was reached.

"We thought we had a treaty with the county for a use permit for five buildings," Smith said of the decisions. The grading permit application was for the fourth.

Lockheed was welcomed when it first bought 4,400 acres at its Bonny Doon site in 1957, he noted. "We were a desirable industry when we first came here."

A number of options are being considered now, Smith said, but a decision is not expected for at least a week. "We really have time in our favor," he said.

If the permit had been granted, construction would have begun in April and ended in October, with production beginning at year's end.

A long-range plan might be to move operations to another part of the county, Smith noted. In any case, Lockheed will continue plans for production of the missile component.

"We can certainly do what we're committed to do," he said.