

UCF Earth Day RP 5/2/90

Environmentalists turn anger toward nuclear power use

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The sabotage of power lines on and after Earth Day drew some expressions of anger at a meeting last night in Santa Cruz, but the anger was directed as much at PG&E as at the saboteurs.

The statements came at a forum at the Resource Center for Nonviolence, which drew 50 people, generally those supportive of environmental groups.

There were few statements of outright support for the sabotage, which knocked out power to 95 percent of the county on April 22. But several speakers said they could understand the frustrations people feel about PG&E and its continued use of nuclear energy. The saboteurs, who called themselves Earth Night Action Group, asked for the shutdown of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

Chris Williams, a student of alternative energy and member of Ecology Action, said, "Anger is a legitimate response to having our lives threatened."

PG&E's methods, he said, including use of nuclear energy, are life-threatening. Williams, who had several complaints about the utility company, was one of three panelists who spoke to the group.

Knocking down the power lines wasn't a legitimate response, though, Williams said.

"It's appropriate to feel anger, but inappropriate to use violence," he said, stressing conservation as a primary strategy.

Panelist Mark Heitchue, of Earth First, took a more militant attitude than Williams.

"Are we going to change PG&E with the present environmental movement? I doubt it," Heitchue said. "I'm for radical action."

The ultimate goal, Heitchue

said, is to "shut down PG&E."

But Heitchue said he doesn't condone or condemn the sabotage of PG&E lines on Earth Day, and that neither he nor Earth First was involved.

Heitchue described Earth First as "an idea," with no members or hierarchy; there are groups of Earth Firsters in various parts of the country. Some Earth First groups believe in vandalism — "monekeywrenching" — to call attention to environmental issues. But those monkeywrenching actions, Heitchue said, are designed to avoid putting people in danger. Some Earth Firsters don't believe in monkeywrenching, Heitchue said after the forum.

Panelist Alison Bowman, who has written about Earth Day and the sabotage for City On A Hill, the newspaper at UC-Santa Cruz, said the mass media failed to focus on PG&E as the target of the saboteurs.

While the media portrayed the sabotage as outrageous, Bowman said, she spoke to a number of people who expressed sympathy for the goals of the saboteurs.

The Diablo Canyon's proximity to an earthquake fault, Bowman said, "threatens a Chernobyl in California."

Bowman said 29 corporations own a majority of the newspapers, TV and radio stations in the United States, so "it comes as no surprise that the media glossed over Diablo Canyon."

Bowman called coverage of the sabotage "a carefully calculated campaign of distortion and lying on the part of the mass media."

Several people in the audience said the action would have had more impact if it had been focused more on PG&E — such as cutting a power line coming out of Diablo Canyon.