

Overseeing Energy Infrastructure



A key part of creating a safe and reliable electric system is ensuring that the review of proposed thermal power plants includes an assessment of the project's design, an analysis of its potential adverse environmental impacts, and a process for public input. The California Energy Commission is responsible for conducting this review and ensuring that these permitted power plants comply with all laws and conditions of approval.

Permitting Thermal Power Plants

Specifically, the Energy Commission is the lead environmental permitting authority for all thermal power plants 50 megawatts and greater that are proposed for construction in California. This authority also covers the project's associated infrastructure such as electric transmission lines, natural gas lines, and water pipelines.

The Energy Commission has sole licensing authority for all thermal power plants 50 megawatts and greater that are proposed for construction in California.



The Energy Commission's permitting process ensures that proposed thermal power plants are reviewed in a transparent, public proceeding and are designed, constructed, and operated in a manner that protects public health and safety, promotes the general welfare, and preserves environmental quality. The process is the functional equivalent of a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review and includes coordination with local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that these agencies' permit requirements are incorporated.

While the Energy Commission does not issue permits for, or regulate the operation of, solar, wind, offshore wind, or electric transmission projects, it does have an interagency agreement with the California Public Utilities Commission to provide a CEQA analysis of proposed investor-owned utility electric transmission projects. The final decision to approve or deny these projects is made by the California Public Utilities Commission.

Compliance and Enforcement

The Energy Commission maintains an inspection and enforcement program to ensure that permitted thermal power plants are constructed, operated, and decommissioned in accordance with their permits and laws. This includes annual reporting requirements, on-site audits and investigations of formal and informal complaints. If necessary, the Energy Commission may work with project owners to bring thermal power plants into compliance or take enforcement action against violators.

Planning for Electric System Infrastructure

In addition to reviewing proposed power plants, the Energy Commission plays a critical role in planning for future electric system infrastructure. The Energy Commission has lead and proactively collaborated with sister agencies on multiple landscape level planning efforts including the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, Renewable Energy Transmission Initiatives, San Joaquin Valley Least Conflict Solar, and the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management-California Offshore Wind Task Force.

The Energy Commission also holds public workshops, funds critical energy research, and issues analyses on California's climate and clean energy goals, renewable energy integration, future electric transmission needs, and proposed options for expanding the state's electric wholesale market throughout the western United States.



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