

Nuclear plant neighbor

The number of people living within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant rose by 17% the past decade

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SENECA — Concerns over living near a nuclear power plant aren't on the front burners of Oconee residents.

According to new data from the 2010 U.S. Census, the number of people living within the 10-mile emergency planning zone of nuclear power plants rose by 17 percent the past decade, compared with an overall increase of less than 10 percent in the U.S. population.

Keowee Key exists in the shadow of Oconee Nuclear Station, one of the largest reactor centers in the country.

Community Manager Kevin McCracken said those who reside in the lake community have expressed no fear when it comes to living in close proximity to Duke Energy.

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"Our residents really don't seem too worried about being so close to the power plant. Yes, there are the recent events in Japan, but the circumstances are so different from our situation," McCracken said.

"I fully expected to get inundated with inquiries and questions following the Japan problems, but I got very few calls," he said. "We did take the opportunity to review our emergency plans, and we do plan to have a community forum to remind people of the proper procedures in the event of an emergency."

Alan Funk, realtor with Bob Hill Realty, said he, too, hasn't heard any concerns about the plant from potential buyers.

"There are a list of things that buyers are concerned with in this market, but living near a power plant isn't one of them," Funk said. "I'll take prospective clients around town and maybe they will ask about it, but most times they don't. And if they do ask, their questions aren't wrapped up in concerns."

Wayne Hobin, realtor with RE/MAX, agreed with Funk and McCracken.

"I never hear anything about it," he said. "It's just not on the mind of people who want to move here. That's the bottom line."

When it comes to people wanting to move to the area, McCracken said more good comes from the plant than bad.

"A nuclear plant is a

great source of employment for a highly-skilled work force," he said.

"Their employees tend to be well educated and significant contributors to the local community. There are also educational opportunities made available at the World of Energy, and the county certainly benefits from the tremendous tax base that comes with the nuclear plant."

McCracken did admit that sometimes, residents want to be kept up to date about emergency planning when it comes to the plant.

"Each year Duke Energy distributes a calendar that contains the evacuation information. A copy of the route and the shelter locations is also on our private website," McCracken said.

"The disaster in Japan has refocused us on the issue, and we have already met with Scott Krein, Oconee County Emergency Management Deputy Director, to review procedures."

Paul Swelter, Salem resident who purchased a home on U.S. 130 last fall, said the plant didn't concern him a bit.

"These nuclear plants are built in populated areas that need power," Swelter said.

"That comes with the territory of wanting to live in a certain place. It didn't bother my wife and I a bit, but we did do our research. In doing so, we learned that Duke is one of the best in the country. That put whatever small inquiries we had to rest pretty quickly."