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New generator cost San Antonio utility \$30M

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CPS Energy CEO Paula Gold-Williams said the new generator will allow the J.K. Spruce 2 plant to operate at its full capacity but will not extend the life of the facility.

Photo: Robin Jerstad /San Antonio Express News

It almost goes without saying the generator that rumbled along rural roads last week on its 160-mile journey to CPS Energy's power station at Calaveras Lake, hauled on a 38-axle trailer, was huge. The entire load weighed nearly 2 million pounds.

Its price tag was considerable, too — \$29 million, CPS trustees learned at their board meeting Monday.

The generator will replace the unit in the city-owned utility's newest coal-fired power plant, the \$1-billion J.K. Spruce 2, which started producing electricity in 2010.

The original generator, built by Toshiba, suffered a core failure due to bad wiring in November 2014. The unit's 18-month warranty had expired. Despite repairs, the plant has been unable to return to its full output of 785 megawatts.

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The five-member CPS board OK'd the purchase of the new generator in March 2017. The 345-ton Mitsubishi-built generator is expected to be installed and operational by February and will have a five-year warranty.

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Benny Ethridge, CPS' senior vice president of power generation, said the new generator's design is more "rugged" than the first.

Some have wondered if the new equipment will extend the life of the Spruce 2 unit, which is expected to run until at least 2042. It's expected to be CPS' only coal-fired plant after 2030.

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CPS' CEO Paula Gold-Williams said the replacement "allows us to optimize the plant as it was originally intended" but "it does not extend the life" of Spruce 2 — a concern among some environmentalists.

The utility is scheduled to mothball its 840-megawatt, 1970s-era J.T. Deely coal-fired plant at the end of this year.

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