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South Bay Landmark Prepares To Come Down

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By [Erik Anderson](#)

SAN DIEGO — The [South Bay Power Plant](#) turned fossil fuel into electricity along the Chula Vista Bay Front since the first turbine was built in the 1960s, but the towering metal structure is coming down soon. The old Power Plant is just a few miles south of Downtown San Diego. The structure's steel skeleton does little to hide the four huge turbines that turned steam into electricity. The energy company [Dynergy](#) is overseeing the demolition.

"There are hundreds of tubes like this that run through the boiler that carry hot water and steam and that's all part of the power generation process," said Katy Sullivan of Dynergy.



By Nicholas McVicker

Katy Sullivan of Dynergy

She pointed at a tangle of metal tubes. "And these tubes will come out once the structure is felled and will be salvaged."

For months, crews have ripped at the bottom floors of the plant. The structure was gradually gutted, said Sullivan, and concrete and metal piles are sifted and separated. Then, the piles are carted away.

"This is a large job. We've removed 7,000 tons of steel so far from this site," said Sullivan. "By the time this project is done, we could have upwards of

24,000 tons of steel that are recycled and salvaged. Considerable amount of concrete and other materials have been salvaged and recycled. Very little waste actually from a demolition of this size"

Construction vehicles help with the tedious process of taking the plant apart. The major support beams are also being readied for explosive charges. On implosion day, those charges will go off in a series of blasts that could last for up to two minutes.

"It'll sound a little bit like rolling thunder," said Sullivan. "And these first three facilities will fall to the north. This last facility on the end here will fall to the east. All of them falling away from the water and other natural habitat."



By Nicholas McVicker

South Bay Power Plant

turbines. The chlorinated and super-heated water was pumped back into the bay. Billions of small marine creatures died in that process each day, and that affected the region's web of life.

"Basically the entire South Bay is a fish nursery. So juvenile fish, if we want to have big fish we have to have baby fish. They grow up here," said Hunter. "The shallow waters are really very important and that's why this plant was located in the most damaging location that it could possibly be located. Right in the middle of a fish nursery area."



By Nicholas McVicker

Laura Hunter, The Environmental Health Coalition

Demolition day is scheduled for February 2, but it can't come soon enough for Laura Hunter. [The Environmental Health Coalition](#) Activist struggle for years to shut down what she considers an ecological disaster.

"It comes from a day when we didn't know any better and we thought we had to put power plants on the coast using the ocean to cool them," said Hunter.

The facility spewed air pollution into nearby neighborhoods, and created ecological havoc by using the shallow bay water to cool the giant

In the shadow of the facility, delicate marshland nurtures all manner of fish, birds and bugs; including the endangered light footed clapper rail.

"If you look around you see the birds using it and you know we haven't done a very good job featuring areas like this because when you look here you don't see the beautiful salt marsh. What you see is the eyesore," said Hunter.

The South Bay Power Plant's 115-acre footprint will change, dramatically, in coming months.

"We're really looking forward to the removal of the power plant," said Tanya Castaneda, public information officer at the [Port of San Diego](#). "That's going to open up that space. And it just part of this grand vision for the 500-plus acres of the Chula Vista bay-front, to make it a more welcoming accessible place.

The Port will build a green space for people, a recreational vehicle area, and a business park here. That will give the public something the power plant has blocked for decades, access to the bay-front.

"When we remove it that's going to immediately affect this whole land area. It's going to make it more desirable. It's going to help us bring in the developers and the financiers to build the world class bay-front that we deserve," said Castaneda.

That potential development along Chula Vista's Bay-front could replace the revenue the Port earned from the South Bay Power Plant when it was churning out electricity. Development here has been held back, according to Castaneda, because not many developers want to build a world-class hotel with a view of a hulking gas fired power plant.

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