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Nuclear expense going up

SEATTLE (AP) — The cost of five Washington Public Power Supply System nuclear plants will increase by more than \$3.8 billion, according to budget estimates.

If the budget estimate is approved by the WPPSS board, the price of the plants will have increased from the initial \$4.1 billion to \$15.6 billion.

The latest estimates include forecasts of additional delays ranging from 12 to 18 months at the plants — which already are up to four years behind construction schedule.

The first plant is expected to produce power in 1983. It originally was to commence operating this year.

The delays are expected to increase chances of a power shortage by the mid-1980s.

The cost impact of WPPSS' five nuclear plants is expected to quadruple electric bills for many of the state's public utility customers, according to a Washington state Senate study.

The WPPSS budget will not be completed and approved before mid-summer. The cost and delay figures include "some contingencies subject to review," said Hank Kosmata, WPPSS manager of relations operations.

The bad news was not unexpected at WPPSS. Delays and cost overruns caused deep discontent on the part of WPPSS executive committee members.

The committee recently forced Neil Strand to resign as managing director. He is acting as director until a new official is named.

"These are the trends," Strand said Thursday during a finance committee meeting.

"They represent how far we think costs will go up or down," he said. "Well, they never go down."

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