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## \$1.5B makeover for NRG Energy power plants means better air for residents

BY LEIGH REMIZOWSKI  
DAILY NEWS WRITER

Sunday, April 25th 2010, 4:00 AM

Northwestern Queens may soon breathe a bit easier.

The fact that the region bears the burden of five power plants remains a sore point for locals, but many of the 1960s-built plants may be getting makeovers in the form of more modern, greener technology.

One such plant is a 600-megawatt site on the East River in Astoria owned by NRG Energy. Company officials have received most of the permits needed to begin a \$1.5 billion repowering project.

Repowering entails replacing vintage steam turbines with newer, more efficient "combined-cycle" turbines, which recycle the waste heat that older units release into the atmosphere.

"The problem is our turbines are 40 years old," said Lee Davis, vice president of NRG. "We bought these older plants with the intent of repowering."

If NRG secures the necessary funding, it will replace 31 old turbines with four combined-cycle units. The new turbines will reduce emissions by more than 75% annually, Davis said. It will also increase generating capacity by more than 400 megawatts.

Of the five plants in the region, three are still using vintage turbines. In January, New York Power Authority closed the Charles Poletti Power Project - a move that locals hailed as a major victory.

"Our main goal is to eliminate these filthy, old power plants," said City Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria).

Vallone said he is working with U.S. Power Generating Co. on a repowering plan for its 1,280-megawatt plant. "There's no excuse to allow them to continue to exist next door to people's bedrooms," he said.

The company filed for its first permit with the state Department of Environmental Conservation in January.

"Our goal is that the community be better off environmentally," said John Reese, vice president of U.S. Power Generating.

The permitting process took NRG about two years, Davis said, and Reese anticipates a similar time frame.

"It's a long process," he said.

TransCanada, owner of the 2,480-megawatt Ravenswood Generating Station in Long Island City, has taken a different approach.

Though officials said they hope to repower soon, the company spent more than \$10 million over the past decade on technology to improve combustion controls on older units - an easier price tag to swallow than the more than \$1.5 billion cost of repowering.

"You can improve these facilities and make them cleaner and more efficient than they are already," said Bill Taylor, senior vice president of Eastern U.S. Power at TransCanada.

Tony Gigantiello - president of the Coalition Helping Organize a Kleaner Environment, or CHOKE - gave a thumbs-up to all plans to repower, but has a bone to pick with one area plant.

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"Our mission is to have all the old plants repowered before any new ones are built," he said, referring to Astoria Energy LLC, which is in the midst of constructing a new 500-megawatt plant next to a unit that opened in 2006.

Locals have fought the company every step of the way, arguing that Astoria should not shoulder any more power plants.

"It's not replacing anything, it's just adding," said Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria).

But Astoria Energy CEO Chuck McCall said the plant will make up for the now-defunct Poletti plant - in a cleaner way.

"It is the cleanest, by far, plant in the city," he said, adding that it will improve air quality not only because it is being built with new technology, but because the city will rely less on older plants.

"This plant directly displaces less efficient plants," McCall said.

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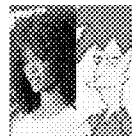
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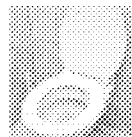
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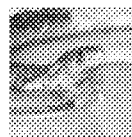
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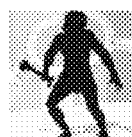
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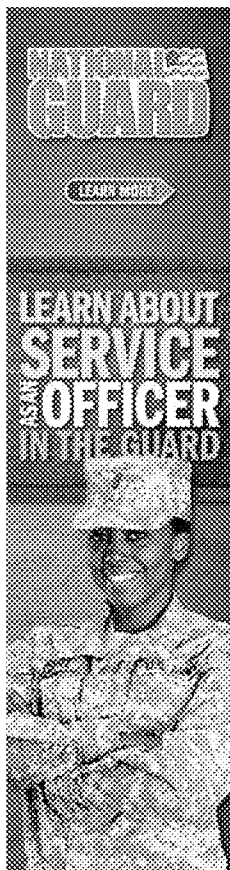
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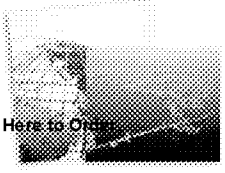
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