

and the science behind the process of generating electricity from uranium fuel.

Julie Holt, a member of the decommissioning staff and former plant worker, welcomed us to the plant. She explained that curiosity is the reason people show up to take tours of nuclear power plants—even closed ones. “Most of the questions are really about how the plant used to work,” she said.

One tour attendee said they passed by the facility all the time growing up, but it was always shrouded in mystery. Others asked more technical questions, like whether the zirconium metal tubes that encase nuclear fuel rods are also highly radioactive.

The tour included different information booths along the walk, including How a Nuclear Power Plant Works, Dry Cask Storage, Radiation Protection, and Industrial Safety. The talks had nice technical details, and visitors could learn about the decommissioning process, the safe storage of spent nuclear fuel at San Onofre, and the current plan for its eventual collection by the federal government and removal to a permanent geological repository, fuel reprocessing plant for recycling, or interim consolidated storage facility.

Mark Lewis, a retired radiation protection manager at SONGS, gave a very interesting presentation on radiation. I learned about the different penetrating abilities of the four major types of radiation: alpha, beta, electromagnetic waves (like X-ray and gamma rays), and neutrons. He used real-world examples, such as alpha particles

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