

Businesses Uncertain Of Future Without Plant

The Associated Press

PADUCAH, Ky. (AP) — Businesses in Paducah are bracing for uncertainty in the wake of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant's expected closure at the end of the month.

The shutdown will put more than 1,100 workers out of high-paying jobs with benefits. Kele Sports Depot shop owner Stephen Kelly told The Paducah Sun (<http://bit.ly/ZbMNEV> [1]) that the plant has a trickle-down effect economically and the loss of jobs will be felt. After moving his sports shop downtown in August, Kelley said he wants to see what his sales will be like over the coming months before making any decisions about his shop's future.

"If they don't think it's going to impact them, then they don't know what's coming," said Kelly, who runs the sports memorabilia shop.

The plan uses local suppliers, including Airgas, a gas, welding and safety supply firm; Atmos Energy; Hannan Supply Company, an electrical supply company and Midwest Terminal, oil and fuel supplier.

Several representatives from four of these companies said their operations do not solely depend plant business.

Suzy Gilland, a real estate agent in Paducah for Century 21 and this year's head of the Paducah Board of Realtors, said real estate agents are waiting to see what impact the layoff news will have on home sales and listings.

"The Paducah market has always been a fairly steady and stable market," Gilland said. "We just have to look at it like that. We want to remain positive, and we look forward to what is going to come."

The Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant is the only government-owned and operated uranium enrichment facility in the country.

The Department of Energy owns it, is responsible for maintaining it and dealing with its hazardous materials and has a say over what new employer might make use of the plant.

Simply transitioning the plant from a working uranium enrichment facility from the United States Enrichment Corp.'s control back to DOE will take well into 2014, according to Steve Penrod, USEC vice president based in Paducah.

Sue Clark, owner of the Ice Cream Factory and the D. Starnes Barbecue restaurant next door and a bed and breakfast upstairs, hopes businesses will take a wait-and-see approach for retailers.

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"A lot of my business here is visitors, tourists to the area," Clark said. "Paducah is pretty resilient. We'll hopefully bounce back and hang on to everything we can."

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[1] <http://bit.ly/ZbMNEV>