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NRC BLASTED FOR MYSTERY COOLING CALCULATIONS

Environmentalists Call for Investigation Into High-Level Nuclear Waste Documents

DURHAM – Environmental group NC WARN revealed today that key safety calculations from CP&L's proposed high-level waste expansion are either being illegally withheld, were never properly reviewed prior to approval – or possibly were never even performed by CP&L.

Since last September, the group has been pressing the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) under the Freedom of Information Act to make available the calculations which CP&L claimed would prove that sufficient cooling capacity exists to expand "spent" waste fuel storage at its Harris Nuclear Plant in Wake County. CP&L's proposal would create the nation's largest waste fuel storage site.

Two nuclear safety experts working for Orange County had contended early last year that information in CP&L's application led to their conclusion that there was insufficient cooling capacity to handle the additional waste pools under certain conditions, a problem which could lead to a major nuclear accident. However, CP&L produced documents immediately prior to a "pre-hearing conference" before an NRC Licensing Board, claiming they were summaries of new heat removal calculations. The Licensing Board relied on CP&L's last minute heat removal claims to deny Orange County the right to further investigate the waste pool heat issues.

With help from U.S. Sen. John Edwards and Rep. David Price, and after repeated requests, NC WARN received four separate packages of hundreds of pages of documents from NRC – including news articles plus letters NC WARN had itself written. Everything, it seems, except for the actual heat removal calculations. In its final response to WARN, the NRC effectively denied that it even has the calculations or supporting documents. NC WARN Director Jim Warren stated: **"There are only three possibilities: either the calculations are being illegally withheld; the NRC never obtained copies to review; or CP&L never even performed the work on this crucial safety issue – after being caught short the first time around by Orange's experts."**

NC WARN is now asking Edwards and Price for an investigation into whether the NRC has withheld information illegally, or whether it never reviewed the crucial calculations at all. Heat removal capacity is the most important of all the safety issues. If cooling capacity falls short and water begins to boil out, the danger of spent fuel assembly combustion and other extreme accidents are maximized under CP&L's plan. Due to the enormous amount of waste CP&L is amassing, such an accident at Harris could release ten times the Cesium-137 as released from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, as calculated by Orange's experts – and not contested by CP&L. As revealed by independent nuclear experts such as Orange's Thompson and Lochbaum, the NRC has ignored the most severe spent fuel accident risks since 1979.

The NRC has long been heavily criticized by citizen groups and even other federal agencies such as the General Accounting Office in 1999, for a multitude of persistent failures and for neglecting public safety due, according to groups such as NC WARN, to the often blatant pressure from the nuclear industry and its cronies in Congress who often receive large political contributions from nuclear energy companies, their executives and lobbyists.

There are numerous other serious safety issues being pursued by Orange County, but CP&L has so far used arcane federal rules to block Orange's experts from arguing their concerns in front of the Licensing Board. **"This is yet another reason why there must be a full formal hearing on ALL safety issues,"** said Warren.

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26