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Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Mike Lesar, Acting Chief, US NRC  
Rules & Directives Branch, Division of Administration Services

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Rules and Directives  
Branch  
USNRC

RE: comments DUKE ENERGY Environmental Impact MOX plutonium fuel use.

Dear Mr. Lesar

Throughout the administrations of Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, the policy of the United States banned the use of plutonium in commercial nuclear power plants due to the risk that the plutonium could be diverted to terrorists and to nations that have not renounced the use of nuclear weapons.

I hope you will reconsider the dangerous, expensive and an irresponsible course you have endorsed that will convert warhead plutonium into civilian nuclear reactor (MOX) fuel. The use of MOX in the U.S. sends precisely the wrong message in the effort to end nuclear proliferation.

As you know, MOX equals plutonium, one of the most toxic, carcinogenic, radioactive substances in the world. This means that the federal government will be transporting plutonium into neighborhoods risking the health of its citizens in order to prop up and subsidize a failing nuclear power industry. You also realize that the production of mixed oxide fuel will result in enormous new quantities of radioactive and chemical wastes that will present significant additional disposal problems and unknown costs. The Department of Energy should be developing plutonium immobilization technologies not endangering the public as well as draining our assets to promote a failed foreign business. It is very sad to see President George W. Bush cut the money for immobilization and nuclear waste cleanup while blindly shoving this ill advised MOX program down our throats. This policy is wrong and will not be supported.

Nuclear waste companies such as BNFL and Cogema cannot be trusted to handle US plutonium disposition. BNFL is responsible for the radioactive North Sea, as well as the MOX fuel falsification scandal with Japan. BNFL is also a key partner in Urenco, a uranium enrichment consortium. It was top-secret Urenco uranium enrichment technology that formed the basis of Iraqis clandestine efforts to attain nuclear weapons capability. The British plutonium program has proved an economic and technological disaster, with a stockpile of some 70 metric tons of separated plutonium and no domestic utilities willing to risk using it. **There are no reactors in England interested in MOX fuel.**

The French national utility Cogema, recently admitted that reactor fuel made with separated plutonium is three to four times more expensive than the conventional fuel made with low-enriched uranium that cannot be used in bombs. Cogema is undergoing severe criticism and scrutiny in France, where it was revealed in the Spring of 1997 that the area near its La Hague reprocessing plant is highly radioactively-polluted and has caused excess childhood cancers. Continued radiation monitoring in the area has found continued high radiation levels, and local beaches were closed during the summer season. In the summer of 1998 while Cogema denied leaking nuclear waste into the ocean, Greenpeace broadcast live via the internet a video showing the actual waste flowing into the ocean. This is not the kind of company that should be handling the most sensitive nuclear material in the United States.

**They are not trustworthy enough for such a dangerous project.**

Here in South Carolina, we already have massive environmental problems from the Savannah River Site. Our ground water is contaminated, the food chain has been contaminated (radioactive fish, turtles and four legged owls). In all past projects here in South Carolina the government and its contractors deliberately emphasized production at the expense of health, routinely violating health and safety regulations, deliberately misleading workers so as not to arouse concerns or give hazardous duty pay when both were warranted. Why should the people of South Carolina believe MOX is safe now?

DuPont and Westinghouse both had visions of grandeur and failed miserably in the nuclear waste department, leaving a massive cleanup bill for the taxpayer.

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Duke power wants to have the taxpayers subsidize them while they experiment with MOX (weapons grade MOX has not been used successfully in a commercial reactor) Ratepayers will pay higher rates for electricity while risking their children's future. Duke Energy is now enjoying record profits while manipulating supply and demand in the power grid in California and is facing legal action. Duke Energy's safety record should also be considered especially the problems with the cracks in their ice condensers.

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Please remember that in over 50 years no nuclear project has ever been completed on budget and there are always more problems than solutions. Mixing plutonium with taxpayers money is not a sound business decision, the people of the United States of America and the environment deserve better-

do the right thing, STOP MOX.

Thank you



Claude Gilbert, Jr.