

ATTACHMENT 4A

COMMENTS GEORGIANS FOR CLEAN ENERGY

**PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR DECEMBER 12, 2001
U.S. NRC PUBLIC MEETING IN ATLANTA, GA**

**RE: DRAFT SUPPLEMENT 1 NUREG 0586, FINAL GENERIC ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT ON DECOMMISSIONING OF NUCLEAR FACILITIES**

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Public Comments for December 12, 2001 U.S. NRC Public Meeting in Atlanta, GA on the Draft Supplement 1 to NUREG-0586, Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Decommissioning of Nuclear Facilities

COMMENTS OF GEORGIANS FOR CLEAN ENERGY

My name is Sara Barczak and I am the Safe Energy Director for Georgians for Clean Energy in our Savannah field office. Georgians for Clean Energy is a non-profit conservation and energy consumer organization. We are a statewide organization with members throughout Georgia and have focused on energy and nuclear concerns for 18 years.

Public Participation Concerns

I would like to start by addressing the process and how it limits the ability for the public to effectively participate in this and other nuclear related issues that impact Georgia communities. The technical nature of the issues and an ongoing resistance by nuclear regulators to share accurate information about nuclear threats has always made it difficult for the public to be involved in decision making involving nuclear energy issues. But after the tragic events of September 11th this problem has escalated to a point where our organization believes it is highly irresponsible of our federal government to go forward with making crucial decisions that will affect generations and generations to come. The NRC's website was not available for a time and is currently severely scaled back, making public access to important background information very difficult or impossible.

I have spoken with representatives of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and they have echoed some of my concerns as they too have difficulty gaining information on nuclear industry activities. If people like myself, who have the ability to research these issues on a full-time basis, along with staff members of the regulatory agency are having a hard time, imagine the fate of a concerned citizen who has limited time to devote? Moreover, the NRC's public notice that went out on November 2nd, 2001 contained an inaccurate link to the to the Public Electronic Reading Room. For citizens concerned about issues at Plant Hatch in South Georgia, unless they have a hard copy of the relicensing documents, it is difficult for them to look up concerns that

would be relevant to today's meeting. Therefore, we feel it is important to both extend the public comment period until these documents can be made readily available. Also it is essential to provide more meeting locations to gather public comments. Four locations is not enough given that we have nuclear reactors that will eventually be decommissioned in many states and the public has had difficulty in even accessing the necessary background information.

Georgians for Clean Energy promotes the shutdown of our unsafe nuclear power plants here in Georgia and the phase out of nuclear power nation wide. We also advocate for sound, systematic policymaking regarding decommissioning. Since many nuclear contaminants are extremely long-lived and dangerous to humans and the environment, decommissioning measures need to be handled most carefully as our future generations, literally, will depend on how well the job is done today.

The notion presented by industry and others that decommissioning is inherently safe because the plant is no longer operating is a deceptive argument that confuses the public. Due to the nature of radiation, even after shutdown, parts of the plant remain highly contaminated and extremely radioactive. The nuclear waste, such as the spent fuel, produced by the plant during operation generates heat and emits radiation for thousands of years after the plant is shut down. Therefore, there is risk to the workers at the plant and to the local communities during decommissioning.

Security

As many things are being reviewed in light of September 11th, decommissioning of nuclear reactors should be no exception. The draft GEIS is grossly deficient in ensuring that security measures are taken to protect our homeland security from threats of sabotage at a nuclear plant. Georgians for Clean Energy requests that a thorough, amended review of necessary security measures be compiled by the NRC and added to this supplement. Again, this highlights the need for an extended comment period and careful analysis of this issue.

It is now abundantly clear that nuclear materials are desired by terrorist organizations. Not only are our operating nuclear power plants terrorist targets, but so too is the nuclear waste they generate. Since a decommissioned nuclear power plant would have a greatly reduced security force, the closed plant could provide an easier opportunity for terrorists to obtain nuclear materials. In the case of plants like Hatch that have outdoor storage of nuclear waste, the notion of a reduced security force is even more troubling.

Site-Specific Concerns

Georgians for Clean Energy does not believe that a generic environmental impact statement (EIS) regarding decommissioning of nuclear facilities is a sufficient tool for evaluating impacts borne to specific environments from decommissioning a nuclear power plant. We disagree with the process of using the significance levels of SMALL, MODERATE, and LARGE for a variety of

issues at a variety of locations to come up with a generic, one-word answer. The classifications are generic in form, hard to understand, and it is difficult to figure out how the NRC came to those characterizations.

We disagree with the NRC conclusion that most of the environmental issues they addressed are deemed as “generic and SMALL for all plants regardless of the activities and identified variables” [P.xv]. I would enjoy hearing the response to that statement from fishermen downstream of Plant Hatch on the Altamaha or Plant Vogtle on the Savannah.

At least two site-specific environmental issues were identified—threatened and endangered species and environmental justice—with only four other issues listed as “conditionally site-specific”. That is ludicrous. We request that licensees undergoing or planning decommissioning require a new environmental assessment. It is not acceptable to give the option of using “recent environmental assessments”. What is the definition of “recent”? For instance, data from the 1970s on several fish and seafood species was originally used in the EIS for Plant Hatch relicensing. Though newer data later emerged, there’s no safeguard that Plant Hatch won’t use studies from the 1970s or 2000 on the endangered species shortnose sturgeon when they begin decommissioning decades from now.

Additionally, each nuclear power plant has a different historical performance record that may have impacted the surrounding environment in ways that are unique to the facility. What makes it acceptable to ignore these operating histories when decommissioning? Furthermore, some nuclear plants, like Hatch, have overflowing volumes of nuclear waste that are now being stored outdoors which impacts the environment and could affect decommissioning. Likewise, there is no experience in decommissioning nuclear reactors that have operated beyond the original 40-year license period. Again, Plant Hatch may pose a unique example if the aging plant is relicensed. The degradation that will occur due to the constant bombardment of radiation could affect how the plant is dismantled and how high the radiation exposures will be for workers and could easily add new accident scenarios. Plant Hatch, for instance, has a cracked core shroud. How will that deficiency affect decommissioning? These factors, among others, must be incorporated in addressing the decommissioning of individual facilities.

Economic Concerns

Georgians for Clean Energy requests that all decommissioning costs should be borne by the parent company of the licensee in perpetuity. The parent company should not be allowed to recoup the costs of decommissioning from the ratepayer or federal government through the taxpayer. Ratepayers and taxpayers in Georgia have already had to pay far beyond their share of promised “cheap” nuclear power that has brought one of the largest rate hikes ever in Georgia. Furthermore, private landowners whether residential or commercial, farms, federal, state, county, city, community properties or others should not be responsible for the costs of monitoring, containment, or clean-up.

Georgians for Clean Energy is also concerned about economic impacts to the local communities associated with decommissioning. Currently, according to NRC relicensing documents on Hatch, Appling County receives an unhealthy 68% of its tax revenue from Southern Nuclear. Provisions for environmental staff and maintenance staff should be established in perpetuity and all costs should be borne by the parent company of the licensee. The local community, state, or taxpayers should not have to shoulder these costs. In the case of Appling County, after they lost their tax base they would not even be able to afford proper monitoring. Again, it is apparent that communities are left dealing with tremendous problems and little or no resources to address them properly. Quite a reward for being loyal to the company.

Regarding economics, the NRC needs to pay attention to decommissioning costs proposed by Georgia nuclear utilities during rate cases and other proceedings so there is not a situation created where much needed monitoring and maintenance is ignored simply because there was no regulatory attention to the real cost of decommissioning.

Environmental Comments

We have several concerns with the Environmental Impact Section of the draft GEIS. Again, we feel that a site-specific analysis must be done for each individual nuclear plant. This includes the area of the site itself along with downstream and downwind regions and all areas within the ingestion radius of the facility. There are already elevated levels of some radioactive contaminants nearly 100 miles downstream of Plant Hatch and Plant Vogtle.

It is hard to believe that decommissioning activities will have a small impact on water quality or air quality. Construction and demolition sites across Georgia, most of which do not have nuclear contaminants, contribute to the degradation of our rivers and air. How can an enormous project such as decommissioning an entire nuclear plant, which will involve the handling of nuclear contaminated materials, have a SMALL impact? We request a copy of analysis that was done to make this determination. Additionally, a thorough analysis of groundwater impacts seems lacking. Given Georgia's current concern over the Floridan aquifer, it is again hard to believe that something fundamental to life, water, is being analyzed generically. Future generations will depend on the resources that we are polluting today.

We adamantly disagree with the possibility of "rubblization" as a method of decommissioning. Chopping up a plant and storing it on site not only sounds ridiculous but also is grossly negligent of the fact that there are facilities designed, built and licensed to handle radioactive materials. Georgians for Clean Energy does not promote the idea of shipping nuclear waste to other people's backyards, but recognizes that although organizations critical of nuclear power often forewarned local communities of these potential dangers, plant owners never told communities near nuclear plants that they were also accepting a permanent nuclear waste dump. Rubblization is an egregious assault on the public participation process and a devious example of corporations

casting aside those communities that supported them over the years.

Georgians for Clean Energy also opposes any efforts by the nuclear industry or licensee of a decommissioning nuclear plant to “recycle” radioactive materials for release into the marketplace. It is appalling that there may be an option for companies involved in a technology that can cause its own facilities to become radioactive, to financially benefit from selling the “hot” garbage to unsuspecting citizens in the form of daily household products.

Health & Safety Comments

The nuclear facility’s land, even after decommissioning, must not be allowed to revert to public or private use even if the NRC believes that the radioactivity on the land is less than 25 millirems per year. Additionally, under no circumstances should future buildings, structures, etc. be built atop the former nuclear site. The draft GEIS mentions that tourism activities are planned for the Trojan nuclear plant in Oregon after decommissioning [P. J-7]. Under no circumstances should that be allowed at any of these sites—bringing tourists or school groups to nuclear plants, even the plants that are running today, is dangerous and unacceptable.

All dockets that dealt with the nuclear facility must be reviewed prior to decommissioning to ensure that all previous problems or concerns with the site are taken into account and are addressed properly and thoroughly in decommissioning plans.

Low-Income Population Impacts

As we have stated in earlier comments, adequate attention to issues surrounding economic justice and the long-term, negative economic implications of decommission plans in the community have not been thoroughly studied. Reactor sites are often contaminated to the extent that the location is made undesirable and unsafe for future economic development. And again, site-specific studies should be conducted. The economy of rural Georgia is much different from that of urban New York.

In conclusion, as we have stated earlier, the methods used to decommission a nuclear plant will affect not only the communities of today but also the livelihood of future generations. The nuclear industry is leaving humankind a legacy of devastation—epitomized by its long-lived and highly dangerous nuclear waste. They are unable to solve their waste problem and now, when faced with the eventual shutdown of their plants, are unwilling to take measures to ensure that the public is protected. The NRC is charged to protect the quality of the human environment and we ask that they all can uphold that charge. The current draft GEIS is not protective and needs major improvement. We again stress the need for site-specific Environmental Impact Statements on decommissioning for nuclear power reactors. Our communities—from the people to the waterways—are unique and are entitled to nothing less. Thank you.