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Subject: VY News, Tuesday, March 2, 2004

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VY Daily News

Tuesday, March 02, 2004

If you have news items to contribute contact Pat Lyman - plyma90@entergy.com

Brattleboro Reformer, Tuesday, March 02, 2004(Front page, below fold)

Senators request a Vt. meeting on Yankee - Mar. 2, 2004

<<https://www.vermonttoday.com/subscribe/>>

By SUSAN SMALLHEER Herald Staff

Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., and Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., have asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to hold a public meeting in Vermont on a plan to increase power production by 20 percent at Vermont Yankee.

In a letter sent Friday to the chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Vermont's two senators cited concerns raised by their constituents in asking for the Vermont meeting.

"We have been contacted by Vermonters expressing concern regarding the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC's) process for evaluating such an uprate and requesting an independent review of the proposal," the letter to NRC Chairman Nils Diaz read. "We write to share these constituent concerns with the NRC and to confirm our understanding of the NRC's newly revised guidance and standards for conducting the review process."

The letter didn't ask for a public hearing, a much more formal process, akin to the technical hearings that were held in the past eight months by the state's Public Service Board on the uprate request.

The Jeffords-Leahy letter noted that they hoped Entergy Nuclear's application for the Yankee increase would be reviewed under the new standards on nuclear power uprates adopted by the NRC in December 2003.

Once Entergy's request for a license amendment to increase power is published in the National Register, then a hearing could be requested, and Jeffords is keeping that option open once the formal review process begins, according to a staffer.

But Diane Screnci, spokeswoman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said late Monday that even after the Entergy license amendment is published, the public has 30 days to comment, but that a formal public hearing is not one of the options.

Screnci said she had not seen the two senators' letter, but that they would get a response. Staff from the senators' offices met with NRC staff last month, raising concerns first brought up by constituents.

Raymond Shadis, staff advisor for the New England Coalition, contested that, saying that any license amendment could be subject to a public hearing, and he said his organization planned on seeking such a review.

He said what the senators had asked for amounted to a "simple public venting session," and not a substantial review of the Entergy application.

Shadis noted that only the NRC deals with safety issues associated with the power increase, since Vermont state review focused on economics and some environmental questions.

"It's nothing more than a public relations tool," Shadis said. "It would be useless. In a public meeting, there is no NRC accountability. They are making a huge mistake if they think it will make the uprate one teeny-weeny bit safer."

"Window dressing? It's more like barn dressing, which is a polite term for what we clean out behind the stalls," Shadis said. "Nothing comes of it."

Shadis said the NRC has never held a formal public hearing on any uprate case involving power increases at any of the nation's 110 commercial nuclear reactors.

Screnci said she hadn't seen the Jeffords-Leahy letter, and she declined specific comment on their request.

But she said the NRC regularly holds public meetings to discuss the NRC review process, and she said the NRC held a similar meeting in Connecticut two weeks ago to discuss its process involving license extension.

"It is not unusual for the NRC to hold a meeting," she said.

Shadis said the NRC was turning a "blind eye" to serious safety issues in the Entergy Nuclear proposal, which would retrofit key components at the Yankee reactor in Vernon and increase the amount of steam generated by the plant, which in turn creates more electricity.

The New England Coalition, an anti-nuclear group based in Brattleboro, has been fighting Entergy Nuclear's request, saying that it puts too much pressure on an aging nuclear reactor, which doesn't meet some current NRC requirements for nuclear plants.

The NRC concedes the point, but says Vermont Yankee has been "grandfathered" on some newer regulations.

Shadis also pointed to the fact that Vermont's lone congressman, Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., had held a public meeting in Brattleboro a few months after the terrorist attacks of 2001 about safety at Vermont Yankee.

"Nothing came of that either," Shadis said.

The Recorder, Tuesday, March 02, 2004(Page 2, above fold)

Engineer Vt. Yankee doesn't meet regulation

Wants discussion before planned 'uprate' granted

By ANITA FRITZ

Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD - A nuclear engineer told 30 concerned area residents at the Second Congregational Church Monday night that Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant doesn't meet today's construction or safety criteria.

Paul Blanch, who worked as a nuclear engineer for Northeast Utilities and has been working as an independent nuclear consultant, said before an uprate is granted, he would like to see a panel discussion with a Vermont Nuclear Safety adviser, members of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the New England Coalition (NEC), officials at Entergy, the owner of Yankee and area residents.

"We also need to see an independent safety assessment to analyze whether Yankee is in compliance with today's regulations what the risks are to uprate the system and what the safety issues are and will be."

He said he isn't against nuclear energy, "but people believe on blind faith that nuclear power is safe."

Peter Alexander, director of NEC, said the 31-year-old nuclear plant near Brattleboro is proposing an uprate which would bring it to 120 percent of the power output it was originally designed for.

"The plant has been in commercial operation longer than any plant in New England and couldn't be built or licensed today as it was 31 years ago. It's been grandfathered when it comes to meeting regulations," said Alexander.

He said Yankee has filed a request with the NRC, but will have to be approved by the Vermont Public Service Board first, which is currently examining the benefits and risks of the uprate.

"Yankee has to be approved by the board first because of a contractual agreement. There were certain conditions put on the sale," said Alexander. "Entergy is bound to obey the board, so it may never get to the NRC," he said.

Blanch and Alexander said an accident, which would be much greater in magnitude after the proposed upgrade, would be dangerous for many towns in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, including Greenfield.

The board is expected to make a decision this month. If it approves the uprate, it would then have to be approved by the NRC, which is expected to make a decision next year.

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Brattleboro Reformer, Tuesday, March 02, 2004(Towns section, page 7, above fold)

Vernon debates adding to water, sewer fund

By JUSTIN MASON
Reformer Staff