



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

December 20, 2011

Mr. Gerry Pollet, Executive Director
Heart of America Northwest
1314 NE 56th St Ste 100
Seattle, WA 98105-2665

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO REQUEST TO EXTEND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR
COLUMBIA GENERATING STATION LICENSE RENEWAL ENVIRONMENTAL
REVIEW

Dear Mr. Pollet:

This is a response to your request that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) extend the public comment period for the draft supplemental environmental impact statement regarding license renewal of Columbia Generating Station (NUREG-1437, Supplement 47). The NRC believes that the public comment period was adequate and decided not to extend it.

As set forth in Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 51.73 (10 CFR 51.73), the NRC established the time period for comments on a draft environmental impact statement to balance the goal of ensuring openness in the regulatory processes with the goal of ensuring that the NRC's actions are effective, efficient, realistic, and timely. The regulations require a 45-day comment period. Also, the NRC will, to the extent practicable, grant extensions of time for up to 15 days. The Environmental Protection Agency notice (76 FR 54767) was published on September 2, 2011, and the comment period ended on November 16, 2011. This included the required 45-day period plus two 15-day extensions for a total of 75 days.

The reasons given in your November 15 request to extend the public comment period are outside the scope of the environmental review which is described in the draft supplemental environmental impact statement. These issues are summarized below with a brief statement about why each is not within the scope of this review.

- The NRC conducted a special inspection at Columbia Generating Station (September 26 – 29 and October 31 – November 2, 2011) to review the circumstances surrounding three events in which operators inadvertently drained reactor coolant from the plant's reactor vessel during a recent refueling outage. More information about this inspection is available in NRC press release IV-11-043 dated September 26, 2011 (<http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1126/ML11269A059.pdf>). The report from this special inspection is not complete at this time, but it will be publicly available upon issuance. You requested an extension to be able to review this report. This special inspection and its results relate to current operating issues and are not within the scope of the license renewal environmental review. While license renewal focuses on managing the effects of aging on certain structures, systems, and components, current operating issues such as these are addressed on a continuous and ongoing basis through the NRC's reactor oversight process

- Heart of America Northwest requested public records from Energy Northwest regarding the potential use of mixed oxide (MOX) fuel at Columbia Generating Station. Energy Northwest adjusted the anticipated deadline for completion of your request from September 23 to December 21, 2011, due to the large volume of records. You requested an extension to the comment period to allow time to review these records. Internal documents from Energy Northwest about the potential use of MOX fuel are not within the scope of this environmental review. On page 2-2 of the draft supplemental environmental impact statement, the NRC acknowledged that it was aware of newspaper articles published in February 2011 about the potential use of MOX. The NRC further stated:

At this time, the NRC has not received notification from Energy Northwest on its plans to use MOX fuel in the future. The staff notes that a change in the type of fuel used at [Columbia Generating Station] will require a thorough evaluation by the NRC on the safety and environmental impacts associated with the new fuel prior to receiving approval for its use.

More information about the MOX program is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/materials/fuel-cycle-fac/mox/licensing.html>.

- Energy Northwest issued a notice of unusual event (event number 46739) about a hydrogen burn that took place on April 7, 2011. This notice was later retracted by Energy Northwest. More information about this event is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/2011/20110411en.html#en46739>. You cited a lack of information about this event as a reason to extend the comment period. This event is a current operating issue and is not within the scope of the license renewal environmental review.
- You stated that a lawsuit filed by Babcock and Wilcox against Energy Northwest on November 14, 2011, includes claims that there was more radiological contamination than expected. You requested an extension to allow the public to comment on this as it relates to the plant's maintenance programs, safety status, and suitability to operate until 2043. Current plant conditions and radiological contamination in the reactor are current operating issues and are not within the scope of the license renewal environmental review.
- On November 10, 2011, Energy Northwest notified the NRC of a loss of functionality of the Technical Support Center emergency filtration system following maintenance because the replacement gaskets were too small (event number 47429). More information about this event is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/2011/20111114en.html#en47429>. You requested an extension to allow time to review this information. This event is a current operating issue and is not within the scope of the environmental review.

Your letter will be treated as a formal comment and will be included in the final supplemental environmental impact statement.

G. Pollet

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If you have any questions regarding this letter or the proposed Columbia Generating Station license renewal, please contact Daniel Doyle, project manager, at 301-415-3748 or by e-mail at daniel.doyle@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Wrona" followed by a small "for" written below the signature.

David J. Wrona, Chief
Projects Branch 2
Division of License Renewal
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket No. 50-397

cc: Listserv

G. Pollet

- 3 -

If you have any questions regarding this letter or the proposed Columbia Generating Station license renewal, please contact Daniel Doyle, project manager, at 301-415-3748 or by e-mail at daniel.doyle@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

David J. Wrona, Chief
Projects Branch 2
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DATE	12/15/11	12/16/11	12/19/11	12/20/11	12/20/11

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY

Letter to G. Pollet from D. Wrona dated December 20, 2011

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO REQUEST TO EXTEND COMMENT PERIOD FOR COLUMBIA
 GENERATING STATION LICENSE RENEWAL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

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