

Rulemaking1CEM Resource

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TITLE: Waste Confidence—Continued Storage of Spent Nuclear Fuel

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From: Romi Elnagar [mailto:montereypinegreen@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, December 20, 2013 7:35 PM
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I would like to respond to the Nuclear Energy Institute's (NEI's) self-serving claim that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) "need not assess the environmental impacts of nuclear plant operation more generally" in order to fulfill the requirements of the Waste Confidence Decision (WCD).

Perhaps this is true -- they "need not" as in, it is not explicitly stated that they do so by the judgement. But assessing environmental impacts of nuclear plant operation more generally is implicitly required because if there is no waste confidence, it is immoral to continue making nuclear waste. Furthermore, if the costs of waste disposal are so great as to make it impossible to operate nuclear power plants cost-effectively, that fact must be recognized. Once the economic and environmental realities are acknowledged, it becomes possible to assess whether the "intractable" problem of storing ever-increasing quantities of spent nuclear fuel is best solved by not making any more in the first place. On the other hand, one only has to look at Fukushima to know what will happen if we keep on running our nuclear reactors until they break. Loss of lives. Loss of land. Loss of income.

For these reasons it is equally inappropriate for the NRC staff to repeatedly describe nuclear waste management as "a small piece of the puzzle" as they have been doing. Waste Confidence is a lynch-pin, an Achilles' Heel, a show-stopper. Over time it will undoubtedly become the most expensive piece of the puzzle, by far -- not small at all.

No wonder NEI is attempting to convince the NRC to interpret the WCD as being so restricted in scope such that the sheer lunacy of producing more nuclear waste in the first place is ignored! NEI claims that "site-specific and generic" Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) cover all permutations of this basic question: Is what we're doing logical? However, they do not: Invariably, ALL other NRC and DOE EISs assume that the waste problem can be solved, thus relegating the dangers of continued operation, continued production of nuclear waste, and continued mining of uranium to matters which can be assessed through Probabilistic Risk Assessments (PRAs). In reality, PRAs utterly fail to assess the dangers of ongoing operations with no end in sight. 100-year floods and earthquakes become inevitable instead of rare if you wait long enough -- and

that seems to be exactly what the nuclear industry wants: For us all to wait until there is a disaster, only to claim they never saw it coming.

Regarding NEI's specific responses to comments made during the hearings, I take particular exception to NEI's first "correction," their description of the 1998 Aberdeen proving ground dry cask test as "not a conclusive indicator" of dry cask resiliency. America cannot afford even ONE catastrophic dry cask accident, so even ONE failure -- and that test was indeed a failure -- is a show-stopper. A hole was successfully punched in the dry cask, using far less powerful weaponry than might be available to modern-day terrorists -- who might even be using our own weapons against us, such as A-10 Warthog anti-tank airplanes (perhaps by turning an American pilot into a terrorist while rising in the ranks of our own military), or by using a tank stolen from a local military training facility or even a National Guard station (it happened in San Diego in the 1990s). It is also possible that terrorists will acquire some other nation's high-powered weapons on the black market.

The Sandia National Laboratory test NEI refers to was similarly insufficient: A "typical" anti-tank weapon is not necessarily a shaped-charge weapon, it is probably nothing more than a Rocket-Propelled Grenade or RPG, and certainly does not "typically" explode once inside a tank or dry cask (it never gets inside but can disable a tank tread, for instance). Such a weapon "typically" is not even made of so-called "depleted" uranium. Are they talking about pea-shooters or real weapons that real terrorists might use? Are they talking Molotov Cocktails or MOABs (Mother Of All Bombs, a thermobaric weapon deployed with great horror by the U.S. Military during the early stages of the Afghan war)? To say the Sandia test used a "device" (unnamed) "30 times more powerful than a typical anti-tank weapon" is evading the issue, and has no real meaning. What if a terrorist gets hold of a nuclear weapon and discharges it near the dry casks? It can happen.

Regarding the "large commercial aircraft traveling low to the ground at 350 MPH" this description clearly belies that it was not tested to be able to survive a jumbo-jet intentionally flown into the facility at 500 MPH or more, and wouldn't stand a chance against a mildly-well-trained suicidal pilot flipping the big bird over on its back, pulling back on the control stick, and diving at 700 MPH or even faster directly into the facility from above. It is a "1-G" maneuver, for that matter -- the passengers would barely even notice if it's done right!!

And an F-16? The "Fighting Falcon" is a beautiful LITTLE jet that barely cracks the speed of sound at sea level. 21 tons maximum takeoff weight, and that drops pretty quickly as it burns fuel. Maximum speed at sea level: Mach 1.2. For the test described by NEI, I believe the F-16 body was on a pulled rail system, well below its maximum speed, and was NOT loaded with fuel (or bombs) during the test.

A Boeing 747, on the other hand, weighs in at about 420 tons, so at least 20 times the inertia of an F-16 -- and nearly half that weight is fuel. Cruises at Mach 0.84. The four turbine shafts for the engines weigh, together, about as much as an F-16.

Every (other) one of NEI's claims is (similarly) twisted logic and should not be considered. NEI has a vested interest in the outcome of this WCD and has exhibited bias in favor of the nuclear industry which funds them, instead of in favor of public safety, at every juncture in these proceedings.

Cordially,
Romi Wythe Elnagar
1447 Bullrush Dr.
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70810

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