

Rulemaking1CEm Resource

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General Comment

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Power Reactor Decommissioning Rulemaking

Public Comment by Larry Minear, Orleans MA

I would like to share my views on the NRC's proposed regulatory improvements for decommissioning nuclear power reactors. My perspective is not that of a scientific expert but as one who, based on the well-documented risks that nuclear power entails, has been monitoring developments regarding the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station for the last several years as a member of several groups on Cape Cod working for the earliest possible shut-down and decommissioning of the Entergy plant at Plymouth.

My concerns were reinforced by the NRC's panel discussion in Rockville, MD on March 15 with outside experts. The quality of the testimony presented by five state officials who appeared as witnesses was excellent in its constructive spirit and specificity. A number of their concrete suggestions would be helpful in strengthening the NRC's role as watchdog and in promoting a wider sharing of experience among plant operators. Consultation with local groups and institutions should also be encouraged.

The responses of the NRC commissioners were generally sympathetic to the expressed concerns. However,

the impression left was that the necessary safeguards to the health and welfare of the public are already in place and that the most one could hope for were minor changes in procedures and increased attention to the lessons-learning process. While fair-minded observers might conclude that the NRC was understating the severity of the problem, few would suggest that the panelists were overstating it.

That impression is underscored in the extensive public comment submitted by Pilgrim Watch, with which I would like to associate myself. I would also like to support comments submitted by the Pilgrim Legislative Advocacy Coalition (PLAC).

Pilgrim Watch concludes from a detailed historical and technical review of the issues and from experience over the decades that "the NRC is not sufficiently protective of public health." It finds that current levels of emergency planning, which the industry is lobbying now to have further reduced, "do not provide adequate protection of public health and need to be strengthened."

As someone who has raised such concerns in public demonstrations, meetings with legislators, and letter-writing, I concur in the view expressed by Florida State Representative Dwight Dudley that "people feel powerless" and that steps must be taken to increase the power of communities and their citizens vis a vis that of the nuclear power industry. As our own State Senator Dan Wolf noted, more NRC field presence and fewer exemptions are needed as the decommissioning process proceeds. The governmental custodians of nuclear power themselves have much to learn from recent experience.