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Systematic Assessment for how the NRC Addresses Environmental Justice in its Programs, Policies, and Activities

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Systematic Assessment for How the NRC Addresses Environmental Justice in Its Programs, Policies, and Activities

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Submitter Information

Name: Deborah Reade

Email: reade@nets.com

General Comment

In my state of New Mexico the NRC has been particularly violating Environmental Justice principles with their actions to license both the WCS Facility (in Texas but discharging into New Mexico less than two miles from the majority Hispanic/Chicano town of Eunice, NM) and the Holtec proposed site both of which want to be Consolidated Interim Storage Facilities for ALL the nation's spent fuel rods. Your information in languages other than English was pitiful and insufficient and you clearly care nothing about adding to the already terrible health and other negative effects that come from putting every possible nuclear waste and processing facility the nuclear industry can think of in the same area of southeastern New Mexico. Industry calls this the "Nuclear Corridor" but that's not what it should be. There are literally thousands of polluting facilities in the area and NRC should be thinking of how they can protect this vulnerable population made up of many people of color and many Low English Proficiency residents. Shame on you. You're just the handmaiden of the Nuke industry and care nothing for the people or to make your actions anything but discriminatory.

The NRC cannot operate in an environmentally just way without acknowledging its past violations of Environmental Justice (EJ) all along the nuclear chain. Most nuclear reactors, uranium mining-milling-"enrichment" facilities, fuel factories, reprocessing, and both high and "low-level" waste sites and transport routes are targeted for or located in/upstream/upwind of low income, rural or inner-city, communities of color.

A next step is to compensate, cleanup, and repair damage done by previous NRC and AEC licensee actions, including over 15,000 abandoned uranium mines and the 1979 Church Rock disaster directly impacting indigenous people. The White House EJ Advisory Committee's list of "PROJECTS THAT WILL NOT BENEFIT A COMMUNITY" includes "procurement of nuclear power."

To prevent repeating the past, NRC should set up structures to assist EJ communities including (1) a permanent EJ Advisory Board to assess all NRC processes, with authority to prevent EJ violations and

(2) an independent division of NRC, with a firewall from existing staff, to assist intervenors (similar to current staff support for applicants).

The costs could be part of license application/amendment fees. Fees should also cover costs of

(3) intervenor funding for legal and technical expertise. Canada has intervenor funding.

NRC's 10CFR2 rules for intervention are clearly skewed in favor of nuclear proposals—they must be amended to enable EJ communities to participate, get standing (presume intervenor status), and for their contentions to be accepted. Local Hispanic intervenors and their contentions were dismissed in the Holtec CIS licensing case. Diversity in NRC-ASLB judges might help.

NRC could improve its EJ policy by going beyond the National Environmental Policy Act requirements. Under NEPA, EJ should be automatically considered in Generic EISs and Environmental Assessments.

EJ “consideration” should include the full revelation of cumulative and synergistic impacts from multiple sources of pollution and health stressors.

Make all information available in the primary languages of the communities and provide longer public comment periods to enable more meaningful participation.

Until the COVID-19 crisis with variants passes, extra measures are needed to enable already-over stressed and disproportionately impacted EJ communities to engage.

Finally but importantly, NRC must seek to determine EJ impacts of many decades of nuclear waste transport along rails, roads, waterways largely through EJ communities from reactors to waste sites. The containers hold more plutonium than the Nagasaki bomb and more cesium than Chernobyl releases and routinely emit radiation even without accidents. There will be accidents and front-line communities will bear the deadly burden without free, prior, informed consent or knowledge.