



**UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**
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RESPONDING DIRECTLY TO DIFFICULT MEDIA REQUESTS

The NRC is always ready to discuss efforts to ensure U.S. nuclear power plants and our other license holders are meeting their responsibilities to operate safely. There are times, however, when circumstances force us to remain silent. We've just dealt with this problem regarding a CNN segment about the Vermont Yankee reactor.

The NRC renewed Vermont Yankee's license in March 2011. A few months later, the plant owner sued the state of Vermont in federal court over state laws that dealt with the plant's continued operation. As the lawsuit unfolded, the Department of Justice said the Executive Branch of the Federal government would stay out of the case. This meant the NRC was bound to remain silent on issues linked to the lawsuit.

CNN approached us in the late fall, asking for an interview about "the Vermont Yankee case," as one press office staffer related the call. The focus of the story was described as coverage of what could be a "landmark case" involving "states vs feds" and it was to include an interview with the plant owner and the Vermont Attorney General. After consulting with the NRC's General Counsel, we replied several times that the NRC could not provide an interview due to the ongoing court case. We did offer to provide them background information on license renewal in general.

The reporter's last e-mail request came in early December, suggesting interview dates when the agency's five Commissioners would be testifying on Capitol Hill. While our reply to that request used the word "overbooked," we also very clearly repeated our main point – "because you are focusing on Vermont Yankee, we are unable to provide you with an interview inasmuch as that issue is before a federal court."

Since the state of Vermont decided just this weekend to appeal the Federal court decision regarding Vermont Yankee, the NRC remains unable to comment on legal issues related to this plant.

We must point out one fact: U.S. nuclear power plants are specifically designed to safely withstand severe natural events. In 2011 alone, various U.S. reactors dealt safely with a direct hit from a tornado, the August earthquake in Virginia, severe flooding along the Missouri River, and the effects of Hurricane Irene (including severe flash flooding in Vermont).