



NEWS FROM BEYOND NUCLEAR

For immediate release: Thursday, December 11, 2014

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Federal Nuclear Regulator Opts Not To Reconsider Critical Safety Enhancements at U.S. “Fukushima” Reactors

Decision designed to save industry money but exclude experts and public

TAKOMA PARK, MD -- The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has buckled to industry pressure and will recommend that the Commission disallow independent experts and the public from participating in a process to reconsider minimal but critical safety enhancements at the nation’s Fukushima-style nuclear power plants.

The NRC staff today said that a rulemaking proposed by the NRC Commission to further analyze filtered venting for containment protection and radiation release reduction following a severe accident is “[not necessary](#).” The nuclear industry has vehemently opposed the installation of external filtered containment vents on the basis of cost and “unintended consequences.”

The NRC staff had recommended the installation of filters as a “cost-benefited substantial safety enhancement,” but the Commissioners instead ordered the installation of containment vents without radiation filters and had instructed the staff to pursue a “[proposed rulemaking](#)” to re-analyze the GE containment filtering strategy.

There are 31 GE [Mark I](#) and [Mark II](#) boiling water reactors operating today in 14 states with the same undersized containment design flaw as those units that exploded and melted down in Fukushima, Japan.

“The NRC is more interested in filtering out the truth about these vulnerable Fukushima-style reactors than filtering the radioactive releases,” said Paul Gunter, Director of Reactor Oversight Project at Beyond Nuclear, who is pursuing independent expert and public support for the filtered containment vents. “The NRC is gambling to save the industry some millions of dollars in safety retrofits against potentially hundreds of billions in damages and human suffering following that next nuclear accident,” Gunter said.

A July 24, 2014 report by a committee of the National Research Council with the National Academies on lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster criticized the NRC for significantly under-estimating the likely costs of a Fukushima-style accident using the Peach Bottom, PA GE Mark I reactor as a theoretical test case. While the NRC put the

figure at \$6 billion, the committee report concluded the cost would be more than \$200 billion.

“There is growing evidence that the NRC is not only ignoring the consequences and real costs of a severe nuclear accident by abandoning a reasonable safety upgrade,” Gunter added. “The agency is also ignoring the input of independent experts from such prestigious institutions as the National Research Council. The agency is demonstrating gross abandonment of its regulatory responsibilities in order to shield an economically beleaguered and inherently dangerous nuclear industry,” he concluded.

BACKGROUND

In March 2013, the Commission majority rejected a staff November 26, 2012 recommendation to order GE reactor operators to install external engineered radiation filters on severe accident capable containment vents as a “cost-benefited substantial safety enhancement.” NRC’s extensive documentation and recommendation is found in “Consideration of Additional Requirements for Containment Venting Systems for Boiling Water Reactors with Mark I and Mark II Containments,” (SECY 2012-0157).

Instead, the Commission ordered the installation of containment vents without radiation filters. The Commissioners instructed the staff to pursue a [“proposed rulemaking”](#) to re-analyze the GE containment filtering strategy. The process opened an opportunity for the public and independent experts to participate in analyzing how operators plan to reliably manage the extremely high pressure, extreme heat and explosive gases while keeping the structure intact and still containing harmful levels of radioactivity during a severe accident.

A July 24, 2014, report by a committee of the National Research Council with the National Academies entitled “Lessons Learned from the Fukushima Nuclear Accident for Improving Safety at U.S. Nuclear Plants” investigated the implications of the Fukushima nuclear accident for U.S. reactors. Appendix L of the committee report “Factoring the Cost of Severe Nuclear Accidents into Backfit Analysis” identified that the NRC severe accident analysis has significantly low-balled its \$6 billion estimate for a hypothetical Fukushima-style nuclear accident at the Peach Bottom GE Mark I reactor in Pennsylvania. The National Academies committee estimated the cost to be more than \$200 billion.

The committee report concludes, “that severe accidents such as occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi plant can have large costs and other consequences that are not considered in USNRC backfit analyses. These include national economic disruption, anxiety and depression within affected populations, and deterioration of social institutions arising from a loss of trust in governmental organizations.”

Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic. The Beyond Nuclear team works with diverse partners and allies to provide the public, government officials, and the media with the critical information necessary to move humanity toward a world beyond nuclear. Beyond Nuclear: 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400, Takoma Park, MD 20912. Info@beyondnuclear.org. www.beyondnuclear.org.