

News from Beyond Nuclear and Don't Waste Michigan

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Citizen Watchdogs Accuse Entergy Nuclear and NRC of Breaking Safety Promises at Palisades Atomic Reactor

Reactor and Radioactive Waste Risks Cited in Light of Chernobyl and Fukushima

South Haven, Michigan—At today's U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) annual meeting on the performance of the Palisades atomic reactor, Beyond Nuclear and Don't Waste Michigan will charge that Entergy Nuclear has indefinitely postponed several major safety repairs, putting the region at severe risk. The anti-nuclear watchdogs will also assert that Palisades' high-level radioactive waste storage facilities remain at serious risk of releasing their deadly contents into the environment, including Lake Michigan. The NRC meeting will begin at 6 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, 125 Veterans Blvd., South Haven, Michigan 49090. Palisades is located on the Lake Michigan shoreline in Covert, Michigan, about five miles south of South Haven.

On March 24th, the 44 year old Palisades nuclear power plant began its 20 year license extension. Palisades received license extension approval from NRC in 2007. Don't Waste Michigan, the statewide anti-nuclear watchdog coalition, led the resistance to the extension from 2005 to 2007, citing major safety concerns such as severe embrittlement of the pressure vessel. Pressurized thermal shock (PTS) could lead to a loss of coolant accident in the reactor core: upon activation of the emergency core cooling system, the vessel, made brittle by four decades of neutron radiation, could rupture like a hot glass under cold water.

"Palisades first violated NRC's pressurized thermal shock regulations in 1981, just ten years into operations," said Michael Keegan of Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Great Lakes in Monroe. "Rather than deal with its embrittlement or else shut down, Palisades has instead successfully pressured NRC to weaken the safety regulations time and again in order to allow it to keep operating, despite the risks," he added.

Keegan's history of PTS risks at Palisades is posted online at <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/071805pressurizedthermalshockpotentialpalisades.pdf>.

"The list of major safety repairs that have gone undone for over five years is a long one," said Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear, a national environmental watchdog based in Takoma Park, Maryland. "In 2006, the previous owner, Consumers Energy, listed reactor lid replacement, a second steam generator transplant, an upgrade of vital reactor cooling water sumps, and enforcement of fire protections as all needing immediate attention.

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Entergy has made none of these urgently needed safety repairs, and NRC has allowed them to get away with it,” he added.

“Any one of these many neglected repairs could lead to a Chernobyl- or Fukushima-scale radioactive release in the heart of the Great Lakes at Palisades,” Kamps added.

The 25th annual commemoration of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe took place on April 26, 2011. Chernobyl, and the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe in Japan which began March 11, 2011, are the two worst nuclear power catastrophes in human history.

A 2006 Consumers Energy presentation to the Michigan Public Service Commission acknowledged these needed repairs at Palisades. This document is posted online at <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/kampsconsbrifeinf051806.htm> (see page 2).

“High-level radioactive waste risks also plague Palisades,” said Alice Hirt of Don’t Waste Michigan’s Holland chapter. “Its outdoor dry cask storage pad, just 100 yards from the water of Lake Michigan, is in violation of NRC earthquake safety regulations, and its indoor pool lacks any emergency backup power in case the electrical grid’s supply is disrupted for any reason,” she added.

Retired NRC dry cask storage inspector, Dr. Ross Landsman of the NRC Region III office near Chicago, first warned of the seismic risks at Palisades dry cask storage facility in 1994 (see <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/021794rosslandsmanltrnrchairmanselin.pdf>). He repeated his warning as recently as 2005 (see <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/landsmandec.pdf>.)

Beyond Nuclear recently petitioned the NRC to force the installation of emergency backup diesel generators and batteries on high-level radioactive waste storage pools at 24 U.S. reactors identical in design to Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant Units 1 to 4 (the General Electric Boiling Water Reactor Mark 1 design; see <http://www.beyondnuclear.org/home/2011/4/20/beyond-nuclear-submits-emergency-enforcement-petition-to-nrc.html>.) Beyond Nuclear will soon follow up with a petition to NRC urging the extension of emergency backup power to other boiling water reactor pools, as well as to pressurized water reactor pools, such as at Palisades, which also lack it.

“Whether due to a tornado, an ice storm, or a tree branch touching a power line, the loss of the electrical grid to run the cooling water circulation pumps at the densely packed high-level radioactive waste storage pool at Palisades could cause boiling to begin within hours, and the high-level radioactive waste could catch on fire within a day or two,” said Kathy Barnes of Don’t Waste Michigan’s Sherwood chapter. “This is exactly what happened at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant’s Unit 4 in Japan, releasing catastrophic amounts of hazardous radioactivity directly into the environment,” she added.

“Entergy Nuclear is infamous for buying old, degraded atomic reactors on the cheap, and then running them into the ground,” said Terry Lodge, Toledo based attorney for intervenors against the Palisades license extension. “Such behavior has earned Entergy the wrath of the governors of New York and Vermont, both of whom are actively opposing license extensions at Entergy atomic reactors in their states.”

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Documentation pertaining to the environmental coalition's resistance to Palisades' license extension is posted online at <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/palisades.htm>.

Based on severe accident risks, environmental intervenor Pilgrim Watch in Massachusetts has resisted the proposed 20 year license extension at Entergy's Pilgrim atomic reactor in Plymouth, Massachusetts for well over five years, the longest such proceeding in NRC history.

NRC's media release announcing the May 5th meeting is posted online at <http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1111/ML11110559.pdf>.