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CITIZENS ENVIRONMENT ALLIANCE OF SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO
DON'T WASTE MICHIGAN * GREEN PARTY OF OHIO

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Contacts:

Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, (240) 462-3216

Michael Keegan, Don't Waste Michigan, (734) 770-1441

Joseph DeMare, Green Party of Ohio, (419) 973-5841

Terry Lodge, attorney, (419) 205-7084

Environmental Coalition Challenges Davis-Besse License Extension on Shield Building Cracks
Groups Cite Problem as Final Straw Regarding Safety Risks at the Problem-Plagued Reactor

Oak Harbor, OH – As promised on January 5th at a standing room only U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) meeting at Camp Perry in Port Clinton near Davis-Besse about its cracked concrete shield building, an environmental coalition today launched a new contention against FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company's (FENOC) proposal to extend the atomic reactor's operations from 2017 to 2037. Beyond Nuclear, Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario, Don't Waste Michigan, and the Green Party of Ohio, official intervenors against FirstEnergy's application to NRC for a 20 year license extension at the long problem-plagued reactor, filed a formal contention in the NRC's Atomic Safety Licensing Board (ASLB) proceeding today, citing the cracked concrete shield building as the final straw regarding Davis-Besse's safety risks. The groups are calling on FirstEnergy to withdraw its application for the license extension, which would mean operations at the plant would cease at the expiration of its current license, April 22 (Earth Day), 2017, at the very latest.

"The unsolved cracking problems seem to tie directly into the fact that the 35 year old Davis-Besse plant is significantly aging, with safety significant systems, structures, and components becoming unreliable," said Terry Lodge, Toledo based attorney representing the environmental coalition. "The public cannot have any confidence in the NRC staff, because the NRC said it would get to the bottom of things before allowing restart, but then allowed restart months before solving this mystery. Consequently, we want the NRC staff to prove to a licensing board, on the public record, that the problem is solved and the plant can operate safely," he added.

"FirstEnergy plans to replace radioactive and degraded steam generators in 2014, which means they would have to cut yet another giant hole in the concrete containment building," said Michael Keegan of Don't Waste Michigan. "This would be the fourth time they would have cut through the already cracked concrete shield building. Each time introduces more and more weakness into this very safety significant containment structure, which is supposed to be able to contain radioactivity and pressure building up within during a severe accident, to prevent its catastrophic release into the environment," he added.

The first three holes cut through the cracked shield building were: first, in 1970, during initial construction; then, in 2002, when Davis-Besse's original, corroded reactor lid was removed and replaced with a new lid, during the infamous Hole-in-the-Head fiasco; then, in late 2011, in order to replace the second corroded lid. Thus, Davis-Besse is now on its third reactor lid.

"How many organ transplants does this monster need?" asked Keegan of Don't Waste Michigan. "Now what's wrong with the steam generators, that they need to be replaced two years from now? How at risk are the steam generators as we speak? A cascading steam generator tube rupture is another pathway to a 'Loss of Coolant Accident' and potential melt down of the reactor core," he added.

A February 2000 steam generator tube rupture at the Indian Point atomic reactors near New York City, along with the 2002 Davis-Besse Hole-in-the-Head fiasco, are considered the worst “breakdown phase” accidents in U.S. nuclear power history thus far.

Joseph DeMare, a State Committee member of the Green Party of Ohio added, "It's clear that First Energy's claims that there is a new, 'safety first,' corporate culture at Davis-Besse are simply fantasy. Rushing a cracked nuclear plant back into production is the essence of a 'money first' philosophy. Wind turbines and solar plants can't melt down and render Ohio uninhabitable like Davis-Besse can. Even as this problem unfolded, FirstEnergy tried to dismiss our contention in the relicensing process that wind and solar can replace Davis-Besse's baseload generation. A company that valued safety first would try to find a way to use the safest technologies first."

Also today, the NRC ASLB rejected FENOC's motion to have the environmental intervenors' renewable alternatives contention against Davis-Besse's license extension dismissed.

“How can FirstEnergy and NRC claim the December 6th re-start of Davis-Besse was safe, when they don't even know the root cause, extent, or safety significance of the cracking yet?” asked Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear. “This amounts, yet again, to a high-stakes game of radioactive Russian roulette at Davis-Besse,” he added.

Kamps wrote a backgrounder a year ago, at the launch of the environmental intervention against the license extension, entitled “Davis-Besse Atomic Reactor: 20 *MORE* Years of Radioactive Russian Roulette on the Great Lakes shore?!” It chronicles the many near-disasters at the plant over the past 35 years. The backgrounder is posted online at http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/Davis_Besse_Backgrounder.pdf.

At the January 5th Camp Perry NRC public meeting, the environmental coalition expressed its “deepest thanks to U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich (Democrat-Ohio) and his staff, without whose tremendous efforts the NRC public meeting would not have taken place, and without whose own independent investigation, the public would have been left completely in the dark by FirstEnergy and NRC in regards to how serious the cracking at Davis-Besse truly is.”

The environmental coalition's contention relied heavily on documentation and analysis provided by the Office of Congressman Kucinich, as well as work done by David Lochbaum, Director of the Nuclear Safety Project at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The new contention is posted on the website homepage of Beyond Nuclear, www.beyondnuclear.org. It can also be emailed to reporters upon request, by contacting Kevin Kamps at Beyond Nuclear at (240) 462-3216 or kevin@beyondnuclear.org. In addition, the NRC ASLB ruling rejecting FENOC's motion to have the renewable alternatives contention dismissed is posted at Beyond Nuclear's homepage.

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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.