For Immediate Release

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NRC To Hold Petition Review Hearing on FitzPatrick Reactor Safety; Webcast Available

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What: A meeting with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Petition Review Board to provide supplement information to NRC on the March 9, 2012 petition filed by the Syracuse-based Alliance for a Green Economy and the Washington, DC-based Beyond Nuclear requesting emergency enforcement action against Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc. with regard to the undue risk to the public health and safety caused by the continued operation of the FitzPatrick nuclear reactor in Scriba, New York without a “hardened vent” on the vulnerable Mark I containment system as requested by NRC in 1989.

When: Tuesday, April 17, 2012
12:30 p.m. -2:30 p.m.

Where: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Commissioners' Conference Room 01F16/01G16
One White Flint North
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Webcast/Conference Call Participation: Interested members of the public can listen during the copetitioners' presentations as well as ask questions during a public question period. To call in, dial (877)-553-7601, Access Code 5087356. The meeting will also be available via webcast. Go to www.nrc.gov, near the top right is a tab for Public Meetings and Involvement. Select Public Meeting Schedule, find this meeting on the list and select webcast. The meeting will be recorded and transcribed.

Details: On March 9, 2012, the Alliance for a Green Economy and Beyond Nuclear filed a petition with the NRC asking for an emergency enforcement action against the James A. FitzPatrick nuclear power plant. This plant is located in Scriba, just 36 miles from Syracuse. The petition asks for the immediate suspension of the plant's operating license, public hearings on the safety of the plant, and the public release of a post-Fukushima safety reassessment.

The FitzPatrick reactor is a Mark I Boiling Water Reactor, the same design as the plants that experienced melt-downs and catastrophic containment failure during the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster. The groups petitioning the NRC have identified that the FitzPatrick is the only plant of its kind in the United States that did not install an NRC recommended hardened vent system, designed to be used to decrease the severity of a nuclear accident and the risk of permanent containment failure. Instead, the NRC has so far allowed the plant to operate with a pre-existing vent system that the agency has acknowledged is does not meet the plant's licensing basis.

In case of a severe accident at the plant, Entergy plans to relieve pressure in the reactor containment system by venting radiation, steam, and explosive hydrogen gas into an adjacent building, destroying the system credited for filtering radiation out of the reactor exhaust where
the pressure is expected to rapidly rise until it blows open the doors of the building, releasing the accident’s radioactive high pressure into the air at ground level. The reactor operator claims that once a high-pressure nuclear accident is temporarily relieved, saving the unreliable containment from permanent rupture, it can close off the pre-existing vent system restoring the containment feature. The operator further claims that the explosive gas along this release path is unlikely to encounter any ignition sources (a spark, a flame, etc). The petitioners contend such assumptions are non-conservative and that the proposed release path increases the probability that workers and the public would suffer massive radiation exposure, as well as the possibility of a dangerous hydrogen explosion that could injure workers or increase the likelihood of a catastrophic reactor failure and radiation releases. More information about the petition can be found at the Alliance for a Green Economy website: www.agreenewyork.org.

The NRC has issued orders that FitzPatrick and other Mark I reactors install a “reliable” hardened vent. However, the response to the orders are not [ ] detailed, likely to be withheld from independent review and public disclosure and the deadline for completion is not until December 31, 2016, if then. On April 17, at 12:30 pm, representatives from Alliance for a Green Economy and Beyond Nuclear will address the NRC’s Petition Review Board at the NRC’s office to provide additional information. They will detail the undue risks to public health and safety posed by continued operation of the vulnerable reactor and ask the NRC to take immediate action to protect the public.

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