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Reprieve for proposed third Maryland reactor just delays the inevitable
French nuclear demise almost complete in the US

Takoma Park, MD - The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) today gave a 60 day reprieve to embattled French governmental electric utility, Électricité de France (EDF), which remains in violation of the Atomic Energy Act while attempting to obtain a license for a third nuclear reactor at the Calvert Cliffs, MD site. But Beyond Nuclear, which has opposed the third reactor and supports a nuclear phase out, views the decision as simply a delay in the inevitable cancellation of all French reactor plans on US soil.

In a decision released late Thursday, the NRC found applicants Calvert Cliffs 3 Nuclear Project and Unistar “ineligible to obtain a license because they are owned by a United States (U.S.) corporation that is 100 percent owned by a foreign corporation.” However, the agency gave the applicants another 60 days to come up with the hitherto elusive US partner. If they fail to do so, “this proceeding will be closed,” the NRC order stated.

Calvert Cliffs 3 was intended to be an Areva design known in the US as the Evolutionary Power Reactor (EPR). Areva is an energy corporation 90% owned by the French government. The application for the new reactor project was filed by UniStar, a corporate merger between EDF and its US domestic partner, Baltimore, MD-based Constellation Energy. But when Constellation withdrew from the project in 2010, citing the overriding financial risks of new reactor construction, EDF, a foreign corporation, was left as sole controlling owner, a violation of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954.

“The NRC’s decision is just postponing the inevitable,” said Paul Gunter of Beyond Nuclear, one of the interveners opposing the Calvert Cliffs EPR application. “When Constellation ran for the exits two years ago, the writing was already on the wall,” Gunter continued. “It’s clear that nuclear energy development has become an economic black hole that smart CEOs are avoiding like the plague,” he said.

The EPR in Europe is an on-going financial and technical disaster. The two EPR projects under construction in Finland and France have both run into constant and lengthy delays, managerial problems, legal challenges, technical flaws and enormous cost over-runs. The Finnish EPR at Olkiluoto, abandoned by original partner Siemens, is now five years behind schedule and 120% over-budget.
The EPR underway in Flamanville, France is four years behind the completion schedule with soaring cost over-runs that exceed $7.5 billion. Three government safety regulators - from Finland, France and the UK - have raised safety concerns about Areva’s EPR design.

Areva had originally planned for seven EPR reactors at six US sites, in Idaho, Maryland, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas. But Calvert Cliffs was considered the “reference reactor” by the NRC. Its ultimate cancelation would effectively nullify the others.

“It’s just a matter of time - 60 days in fact - before we see the phantom promise of the so-called ‘new generation’ French reactor evaporate here in the US,” said Gunter of Beyond Nuclear. “In fact, industry-wide, nuclear power is proving too expensive and too risky with multi-year delays, fleeing corporate partners and ballooning costs the norm.”

In a similar instance, in the aftermath of the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, when US corporation, NRG Energy, pulled its investment from two proposed new reactors at the existing South Texas nuclear station near Houston, Japanese partner Toshiba attempted to continue with the project. But late last year, the NRC said it would not issue a construction license because the current project ownership did not meet foreign ownership restrictions.

In recent weeks, two planned reactors in Texas were canceled by the country’s biggest nuclear corporation, Exelon which sees no economic future in nuclear energy. Four reactors - in California, Nebraska and Florida - remain closed because of dangerous technical and structural flaws. Southern California Edison is about to lay off 730 workers. And the shutdown of the Waterford reactor in Louisiana in advance of Hurricane Isaac demonstrates that nuclear plants are a liability during a natural disaster when uninterrupted electricity supply can be critical.

In November 2008, three national safe energy groups - Beyond Nuclear, Nuclear Information & Resource Service, Public Citizen - and the local citizens group Southern Maryland Citizen Alliance for Renewable Energy Solutions - formally petitioned the NRC licensing board for a hearing opposing the Calvert Cliffs 3 application. The joint petition included the contention that EDF, as the dominate owner of the third proposed reactor, was in violation of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 as amended and NRC licensing regulations, which prohibit controlling foreign ownership of a US nuclear plant.

For details on the shutdowns, cancelations, and cost-over-runs of nuclear projects in the US and worldwide, see the Beyond Nuclear Retreat web page at http://www.beyondnuclear.org/the-nuclear-retreat/ and World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2012, by Mycle Schneider and Antony Froggatt at
Beyond Nuclear works to end nuclear power and nuclear weapons. With a strongly rooted commitment to citizen action - and in the wake of the devastating Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan - Beyond Nuclear is empowering grassroots communities around the country to shut US nuclear reactors. This summer, through our campaign to “Freeze our Fukushimas,” we will organize town hall meetings, media campaign, actions, petitions and protests to ensure that the 23 US reactors identical in design to those at Fukushima are closed. More at www.beyondnuclear.org.