Opponents to 20 more years at Davis-Besse cite radioactive waste dilemma, renewable alternatives

Recent WIPP dump leak undermines NRC assumptions, Wind/Solar growing by leaps and bounds

Port Clinton, OH—Representatives from an environmental coalition opposing a 20-year license extension at FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company’s (FENOC) problem-plagued Davis-Besse atomic reactor will speak out at U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) public meetings today at Camp Perry. NRC will be receiving public comments on its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding the license extension.

The coalition’s attorney, Terry Lodge of Toledo, pointed to the Feb. 14th radioactivity leak at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico as a showstopper for NRC’s “Confidence” in commercial high-level radioactive waste (HLRW) management.

Decades ago, NRC assumed that commercial HLRW could be disposed of in bedded salt formations, and that there would be zero radioactivity releases forevermore. However, NRC admitted several years ago that commercial irradiated nuclear fuel disposal in bedded salt is inappropriate, due to the risk of its concentrated thermal heat causing the failure of engineered burial caverns. Despite this admission, NRC’s obsolete and incorrect assumptions remain the basis for Davis-Besse’s current 40-year operating license, and would remain in place during the license extension.

“NRC’s assumptions regarding the disposal of Davis-Besse’s radioactive wastes have been fatally undermined by the WIPP leak,” Lodge said. “NRC’s blank check for radioactive waste generation at Davis-Besse should be immediately voided.”

On behalf of several groups (Beyond Nuclear, Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario, Don’t Waste MI, and the Green Party of OH), Lodge has filed multiple motions in the Davis-Besse license extension NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) proceeding, challenging NRC’s carte blanche permit allowing FENOC to generate unlimited amounts of HLRW. Currently, per federal appeals court order, NRC’s final approval of Davis-Besse’s license extension cannot occur until a separate agency EIS, on its Nuclear Waste Confidence Decision and Rule, has been completed.
In parallel, the coalition has joined a nation-wide NRC Petition for Rulemaking effort, seeking to force NRC to revise its license extension regulations, based on recent agency acknowledgement of HLRW on-site storage risks in pools, such as leaks (already confirmed by NRC at Davis-Besse), as well as catastrophic fires.

Opponents to the Davis-Besse license extension also revived their contention that renewable sources of electricity, such as wind power and solar photo-voltaics (PV), could readily replace the atomic reactor's 908 Megawatts of electricity (MWe).

Joe DeMare pointed to increasing evidence that renewables are rearing to go.

“Ohio's approval of the 300-MWe EverPower Scioto Ridge wind power project bolsters the scores of filings we’ve presented in this proceeding showing that wind power alone could replace Davis-Besse during the 2017 to 2037 timeframe,” DeMare said. “In fact, a week ago, the PJM Interconnect, the single largest electric grid in the U.S., reported that it could readily integrate 30% of its supply from wind and solar sources.”

In 2011, the Davis-Besse ASLB agreed to hear the merits of the environmental coalition’s renewable energy alternative contention. The coalition's expert witness is Distinguished University of Toledo Professor of Physics, Emeritus, and CEO and Chief Technology Officer of Lucintech Inc., Dr. Alvin Compaan. However, FENOC appealed the decision, and in 2012 the five-member NRC Commission overruled the ASLB, blocking the evidentiary hearing.

“Despite NRC’s gutting of the National Environmental Policy Act, and its neglect of renewable alternatives to a risky, dubious Davis-Besse license extension, facts on the ground in Ohio are proving us right,” Lodge concluded.

“The worsening cracking of Davis-Besse's concrete containment, the corrosion of its inner steel containment vessel, the risks of its experimental steam generator replacement, and its recently revealed Shield Building wall gap are clear signs that this atomic reactor is overdue for retirement and decommissioning,” said Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear.

Written public comments on NRC’s license extension DEIS can be submitted till April 21st via the federal rulemakings website at www.regulations.gov, using Docket ID NRC-2010-0298, or mailed to Cindy Bladey, Chief, Rules, Announcements, and Directives Branch, Office of Administration, Mail Stop: 3WFN-06-44M, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001.

Davis-Besse's current 40-year operating license will expire on Earth Day (April 22), 2017.