



NEWS FROM BEYOND NUCLEAR

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Beyond Nuclear welcomes Oyster Creek nuclear plant early closure announcement

But America's Fukushima-design reactors should have closed immediately after Japan disaster

TAKOMA PARK, MD -- "While we welcome Exelon's announcement that it will close its Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station in October 2018, this should have happened immediately after the March 11, 2011 Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan," said Paul Gunter, Director of the Reactor Oversight Project at Beyond Nuclear, a leading national anti-nuclear watchdog group.

Exelon announced today that it would shut the reactor more than a year earlier than its December 2019 closure date, but the company has not given an explanation for its decision. However, an Exelon press release alludes to "managing costs." Oyster Creek is the first and the oldest Fukushima-design nuclear reactor in the world, a GE Mark I boiling water reactor.

"It's clear that Oyster Creek and the entire, aging U.S. nuclear reactor fleet is hemorrhaging financially," Gunter said. "The fact that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the nuclear industry continue to prioritize financial margins over public safety margins is a growing concern, especially at the remaining 29 Fukushima style reactors still operating in the U.S.," Gunter continued.

"None of our country's Fukushima-design reactors should have operated for even one more day once we saw the catastrophic events publicly unfold worldwide at Fukushima," Gunter said.

In June 2013, the NRC issued an Order requiring the U.S. fleet of Mark I (22) and Mark II (8) reactors to upgrade their containment systems with a hardened venting system that would deliberately vent the extreme pressure, heat and radiation from a severe nuclear accident.

"Following the three explosions at the Fukushima nuclear reactors, the NRC finally admitted that this containment design doesn't work," Gunter added. "And yet the agency has been utterly delinquent in ensuring that the safety upgrades the NRC itself ordered have been made at our country's most dangerous nuclear power plants."

Oyster Creek was granted a license extension to continue operation until 2029, but Exelon announced in 2010 that it would close on December 31, 2019. However, after issuing the 2013 Fukushima related Order, the NRC conceded to Oyster Creek's request for a waiver from complying, allowing the plant to avoid the vent installation until January 31, 2020, one month after the reactor would have closed. Oyster Creek was supposed to have complied with the Order following its September 2016 refueling outage.

“Beyond Nuclear is appealing a long-standing Freedom of Information Act request, that the NRC has stonewalled, demanding to know how the agency allowed the country’s oldest Fukushima design reactor to avoid this essential safety upgrade required by the NRC’s own Order,” said Gunter.

“The October 2018 shutdown narrows the window for potential disaster a little more but it remains outrageous that the NRC had allowed Exelon to gamble with the lives of people in New Jersey for almost five more years, ignoring its own Fukushima Lessons Learned report and Order,” Gunter said.