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Protesters Want NRG Energy to Halt Nuclear Reactor Licensing No More Chernobyls, No More Fukushimas, No More Nuclear Reactors

Austin, TX Last week NRG Energy announced that they will halt further investment in two proposed South Texas Project nuclear reactors, a strong step in the right direction. However, protesters demanding crucial further steps took to the streets today, urging NRG to halt reactor licensing.

“NRG was right to protect the financial health of the utility by pulling out of investment in the \$18.2 billion reactors,” said Marion Mlotok, spokesperson for the SEED Coalition. “But it is crucial that NRG fully halt the licensing of the proposed reactors and withdraw their federal loan guarantee application, since approval would allow billions of taxpayer dollars to go toward building more nuclear reactors. Another company could come in and buy out the reactor project, which should instead be halted entirely. These reactors should not be built by NRG or any other company.”

Reactor opponents have a strong legal case addressing the risks of co-locating multiple reactors at the same site and contend that NRG’s plan to deal with fires and explosions is inadequate. The groups recently wrote to the NRG Board, urging that the reactor license application and federal loan guarantee application be withdrawn and that the company stop pursuit of adding 20 years of operating life for existing aging reactors. STP Nuclear Operating Company estimates an \$18.2 billion pricetag for two reactors. If the financially shaky project somehow moves forward, a loan default would fall on the shoulders of already burdened taxpayers.

“Nuclear power comes with significant health risks, since radioactive exposure is linked to cancer and birth defects. Radionuclides routinely released in nuclear reactor operations have been linked to developmental problems, birth defects, reproductive problems, cardiovascular disease, leukemia and other cancers,” said Trish O’Day, a nurse and board member of Austin Physicians for Social Responsibility. “Epidemiological studies of children living near nuclear reactors show a positive association between leukemia and proximity to nuclear reactors. Pollutants from nuclear power such as tritium, which acts like water in the body, can enter fetuses through the placenta. Tritium is linked to cancer and genetic abnormalities.”

“Due to health and safety concerns and the increasing risks that come as reactors age, NRG should halt re-licensing of the two existing South Texas Project reactors,” said Susana Almanza, Director of PODER. “Re-licensing would allow another 20 more years of operation for the reactors, which are now set to retire in 2027 and 2028. The nuclear disaster in Japan is teaching the world lessons the hard way about the increased risks of aging reactors. Japan’s Fukushima’s Reactor No. 1, the oldest reactor at Daiichi site, had just been given a 10-year extension despite

safety warnings a month before the March nuclear disaster.” Reactor No. 1 exploded and has the most seriously damaged fuel rods, which may not be fully covered with water until July despite the pumping of six tons of water every hour.

“In 1993-1994 both South Texas Project 1 & 2 had year-long outages in order to bring them back to even basic safety levels, at a cost of roughly a billion dollars each,” said Susan Dancer, Director of the South Texas Association for Responsible Energy, who lives only eight miles from the site. “There have been recent problems at the reactors as well, which are getting nothing but worse. Unit One is currently having an unplanned extended outage. The only safe path is to transition away from aging nuclear reactors.” Dancer spoke in Houston at a protest being held in conjunction with the Austin event.

A Union of Concerned Scientists report notes that in 27 years following the Three Mile Island meltdown, “38 U.S. nuclear power reactors had to be shut down for at least one year while safety margins were restored to minimally acceptable levels...Safety restoration outages result from cumulative, systemic degradation of reactor components. A year-plus outage of this kind is not needed to fix damage caused by an accident or to replace or repair a major component, but to fix dozens or even hundreds of equipment problems that have accumulated over time.”

The protest was held on the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, a level 7 nuclear disaster, which some researchers now say cost 985,000 lives, mostly cancer related deaths. The ongoing Fukushima nuclear disaster is now also rated level 7. A 1982 NRC study (CRAC-2) found that 18,000 early deaths could result from an accident at the South Texas Project site.

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