

NEW ENGLAND COALITION
PRESS RELEASE
OCTOBER 15, 2004

REACTION: (NRC Press Release 04-133) NRC EXTENDS REVIEW SCHEDULE FOR VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT UPRATE REQUEST

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Today, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission issues a press release announcing that review of Entergy Nuclear Vermont Yankee's (ENVY) application for Extended Power Uprate would take longer than originally planning; pushing back the January 31, 2005, completion date.(NRC Press Release Copy is Attached Below)

NRC said the agency had not, as of October 7, 2004, received sufficient information regarding measures ENVY will use to attempt to prevent steam-dryer cracking. The massive reactor internal component failed in four of ten plants receiving uprates of 13 percent or more.

New England Coalition Staff Technical Advisor, Raymond Shadis, greeted the news with a mixed sense vindication of New England Coalition's arguments before the Vermont Public Service Board and outright skepticism of NRC's "real" motives in ordering the delay.

"First, everyone needs to understand that the issue is real and it is important. This is a both a reliability issue and a safety issue, dollars and danger," Shadis said, "in one reactor a piece of heavy steel nine feet long and a foot and a half wide tore loose and was blown down the steam line at supersonic speed." Our nuclear engineering expert Arnold Gundersen of Burlington made the issue of greatly decreased reliability plain to the Vermont Public Service Board, but they and the State chose to believe ENVY's blandishments"

"In fact," Shadis said, " we dropped four post-hearing filings on the Public Service Board, asking them to take notice of increased steam dryer failures and they refused to look at it."

" More important to us right now," he added, " are the NRC's motives moving the approval date back. We don't place much faith in NRC. . I don't know of any public advocacy group that has dealt with NRC that will call the agency trustworthy."

(MORE)

Shadis wrote out his list of suspected reasons for the schedule rollback. It is now our educated surmise, he wrote, that there are one of three or a combination of three underlying reasons for the decision delay:

1. We have reason to believe that new safety issues were discovered in the Design Basis and Engineering Team Inspection completed on September 6, 2004. NRC is stalling holding an exit meeting or publishing an inspection report pending some creative editing and may be waiting to see if New England Coalition and the State of Vermont will get a hearing on safety issues.
2. We now know from NRC internal documents received in a Freedom of Information Act Request that NRC is moving to do away with longstanding rules that insure adequate reactor cooling under emergency conditions, namely, a prohibition of the use of containment overpressure to assist emergency cooling pump performance. We think they are buying time in which to justify both the regulatory change and the exceptions NRC has already granted
3. We suspect that the NRC may be hoping to avoid releasing information containing safety concerns until the NRC hearing process, which New England Coalition and the State of Vermont are seeking, is completed. By delaying the projected decision date, they are expanding the time they have in which to make such information public.

“In twenty five years of dealing with NRC, I have learned that when NRC comes swimming by”, quipped the veteran activist,” usually all you can see is the fin sticking above the water.”

END
NRC PRESS RELEASE FOLLOWS



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's review of Entergy Nuclear's application for a 20 percent power increase, or uprate, at Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (VYNPS) will take longer than its original Jan. 31, 2005, completion date.

"The NRC, with its commitment to public health and safety, will not allow an increase in Vermont Yankee's operating power level unless we are certain the change could be done safely," said Jim Dyer, Director of the agency's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR). "The NRC will ask Entergy for more information until we're satisfied we have what we need to properly review the application."

Early on in the review process, NRC staff made it clear that operating experience from other plants, which had performed uprates similar to what Vermont Yankee proposes, raised an important generic issue for the review concerning the potential for steam dryer failures following implementation of a power uprate.

In a letter to Entergy, Ledyard Marsh, Director of NRR's Division of Licensing Project Management, said:

"During the review, in an attempt to resolve our steam dryer concerns, the NRC staff has requested additional information, held three public meetings with Entergy, and performed an audit of the steam dryer analysis at the General Electric office in San Jose, California. Based on review of the information provided in the application, the supplements received through October 7, 2004, and the results of the audit, the NRC staff has determined that the information submitted by the licensee to date does not yet provide sufficient assurance that the VYNPS steam dryer will remain capable of maintaining its structural integrity under [uprate] conditions. During the audit and the most recent public meeting, Entergy staff indicated that further information will be submitted to address the NRC staff concerns related to steam dryer integrity."

The additional information is needed before NRC staff can complete a draft safety evaluation on the proposed uprate, and will therefore delay review by the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, an independent group of nuclear experts. Once Entergy provides the information and NRC staff carefully reviews it, a more definitive schedule for completing the uprate review will be available.