

Beyond Nuclear, C-10 Research & Education Foundation, Friends of the Coast, Seacoast Anti-Pollution League

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Doug Bogen, SAPL, 603-664-2696

Sandy Gavutis, C-10, 978-465-6646

Paul Gunter, Beyond Nuclear, 301-270-2209 & 301 523 0201 (cell)

Ray Shadis, Earth Day Commitment/Friends of the Coast, 207-882-7801

CITIZEN GROUPS PETITION NRC TO SUSPEND REVIEW OF SEABROOK RELICENSING THROUGH THE AGENCY'S RULEMAKING PROCESS

Hampton Falls, NH: A newly formed coalition of state, regional and national citizen organizations announced today that they have filed of a formal petition to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to change a rule which currently permits a nuclear power company to submit an application for a 20-year operating license extension 20 years before the expiration of its 40-year operating license. They have petitioned the NRC to make a rule change to require that the license extension process begin no more than 10 years before the expiration date. The petition further calls on NRC to suspend its current review of NextEra's (aka Florida Power & Light) license extension application for the historically controversial Seabrook nuclear power plant because the application filed 20 years in advance of an expiration date is premature and thus significantly deficient. NextEra is the first nuclear power company to file a relicensing application 20 years in advance of its current operating expiration date which in the case of Seabrook falls on March 15, 2030.

"We find this whole license renewal process to be highly premature, since it cannot possibly take into account all of the key factors affecting plant maintenance, reliability and safety, from the deterioration of vital plant systems and infrastructure to climate change and future power needs over the next 40 years," said Doug Bogen, executive director of Seacoast Anti-Pollution League. "We want the NRC to suspend this premature and deficient process now in the public interest," he said.

The "Petition for Rulemaking" filed with the NRC on August 18, 2010 was authored by Friends of the Coast based in Edgecomb, ME, the New England Coalition and Beyond Nuclear and signed by supporters including the Seacoast Anti-Pollution League and C-10 Research and Education Foundation and [INCLUDE OTHERS SIGNED ON BY THE 10 AM DEADLINE HERE]. The rule making petition is part of a formal NRC process provided under the Code of Federal Regulation where petitioners can request the federal agency to make a rule change and during its review process suspend any licensing proceeding until the petition request is addressed.

The petition requests amending the current NRC rule for the earliest time that a nuclear power company can make application for a 20-year license extension on its 40-year operating license from 20-years in advance of the expiration date to 10-years in advance of that expiration date. The petition argues that submitting a relicensing application 20-years in advance of its license expiration makes for inaccurate and incomplete applications, unreasonably thwarts the public participation of an entire coming generation of residents and commercial interests in the license extension process, stretches the nuclear industry and the NRC's credibility to predict the aging and deterioration of vital nuclear power plant systems to untenable lengths and violates the spirit and intent of the National Environmental Policy Act.

"The industry and NRC cannot reasonably determine what the remaining safety margins will be on this reactor 20 years from now and then 20 years more years of operation beyond that," said Paul Gunter, director of the Reactor Oversight Project for the Takoma Park, MD-based antinuclear group, Beyond Nuclear. "There are a number of significant reactor systems that do not today have acceptable practices for predicting and managing the deterioration that naturally comes with age," he said.

"Seabrook cannot now provide a full accounting for safety-related electrical cables many of which are inaccessible for inspection and submerged in a corrosive environment--let alone gaze into a crystal ball twenty, forty years into the future," said Sandy Gavutis, Executive Director of the C-10 Education and Research Foundation based in Newburyport, MA pointing to just one of Seabrook's reactor systems mired in controversy today. "This is increasingly risky business, but of more concern, the NRC has not even designed an electrical cable oversight and monitoring program for these aging power, instrumentation and control cables," she said.

"The current rule promotes the failure of a license renewal application to encompass the potential effects of an environment that is arguably changing at an unprecedented rate," wrote Ray Shadis, Friends of the Coast in Edgecomb, ME and a principle author of the petition. "What level of coastal subsidence or ocean level rise may be predicted with confidence over the next forty years?" he concluded.

"Pursuing a license renewal at this time is Florida Power and Light's 'next error'," said Bogen. "We reject this bald faced attempt to short-circuit the growing public demand for more safe, secure and sustainable power sources, which will inevitably undermine the rationale for continued reliance on this plant's power generation in coming decades."