

Opponents to Palisades Nuclear Power Plant 20 Year License Extension Cite Brittle Reactor as Catastrophic Risk

Operating the 35 year old Palisades nuclear power plant for 25 more years
risks rupture of the highly embrittled reactor vessel
and catastrophic radiation release into the Great Lakes Basin

The current owner (Jackson, Michigan-based Consumers Energy Company, a subsidiary of CMS) and prospective buyer (New Orleans-based Entergy Nuclear) of the Palisades nuclear power plant in Covert (just seven miles south of South Haven, on the Lake Michigan shoreline in southwestern Michigan) are urging the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to extend the original 40 year operating license for an additional 20 years.

But concerned citizens fear this risks a catastrophic accident. Palisades is perhaps the most embrittled reactor vessel in the United States. Neutron radiation from the nuclear chain reaction in the reactor core has seriously impacted the metal's ductility. If, during an emergency, cooling water is pumped into the thermally hot and highly pressurized reactor core, the "pressurized thermal shock" (PTS) could rupture the brittle reactor vessel like a hot glass under cold water, releasing catastrophic amounts of radioactivity into the air and waters of Lake Michigan, the source of drinking water (and so much more) to tens of millions of people downstream.

Given the severe risks stemming from Palisades' embrittlement, a growing coalition, comprising dozens of environmental and public interest organizations representing well over 200,000 Michigan citizens, opposes the 20 year license extension (see list of groups, below).

Palisades also has a serious waste problem. Electricity is but a fleeting byproduct from the reactor. The actual product is forever deadly high-level radioactive waste. Palisades' indoor waste storage pool was full in 1993. Ever since, the overflowing waste has been stored in outdoor concrete/steel silos on sand dunes just 150 yards from Lake Michigan. The pads under these casks are in violation of earthquake regulations. A quake could send the waste into the Lake. Thus Palisades has no safe place to store its wastes. A first step towards solving this growing waste problem at Palisades is to stop making it in the first place, as by preventing the 20 year license extension.

The Palisades reactor presents many additional problems. The NRC allows it to emit harmful radioactivity and toxic chemicals into the air and water on a daily basis, as a part of "routine" operations. This threatens to contaminate the recently installed drinking water supply intake for the City of South Haven built offshore from Van Buren State Park, immediately downstream from the Palisades reactor. Also, Palisades has troubling environmental justice problems. Palisades is located in a predominantly African American and low income township and participates in the industry-wide targeting of Native American lands out west for high-level radioactive waste dumps, such as the proposed national dump at Yucca Mountain, Nevada on Western Shoshone Indian lands.

Aside from embrittlement, the Palisades reactor suffers widespread age-related deterioration and degradation, threatening equipment failures that could exacerbate the embrittlement problem, or lead to a major accident even if the reactor vessel itself never ruptured.

In addition, the Palisades reactor, waste storage pool, and outdoor waste silos are potentially catastrophic terrorist targets. The 9/11 Commission reported that Al Qaeda scouted out and considered targeting nuclear plants in 2001, and could do so again in the future. Little has been done at Palisades to defend against this threat.

Concerned individuals and organizations are urged to add their names to this growing coalition effort. To add your individual and/or group name to those opposing the 20 year license extension at Palisades nuclear power plant, and to learn more ways you and your group can help, please contact Kevin Kamps (a board member of Don't Waste Michigan) at Nuclear Information and Resource Service at 301.270.6477 ext. 14 or kevin@nirs.org. See <http://www.nirs.org/reactorwatch/licensing/palisades.htm>.

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List of organizations opposing 20 year license extension at Palisades nuclear power plant:

Alliance for the Great Lakes, Grand Haven, Michigan
Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana
Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination, Mattawan, MI
Citizens for Renewable Energy (CFRE), Lion's Head, Ontario
Citizens Resistance at Fermi Two, Monroe, Michigan
Clean Water Action, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Great Lakes, Monroe, Michigan
Don't Waste Michigan, Holland, Michigan
Great Lakes United, Buffalo, New York
Green Party of Michigan, Detroit, Michigan
Green Party of Van Buren County, Bangor, Michigan
Home for Peace and Justice, Saginaw, Michigan
Huron Environmental Activist League, Alpena, Michigan
IHM Justice, Peace, and Sustainability Office, Monroe, Michigan
Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), Bemidji, Minnesota
International Institute of Concern for Public Health, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Kalamazoo River Protection Association, Saugatuck, Michigan
League of Women Voters of the Holland Area, Holland, Michigan
League of Women Voters of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan
Lone Tree Council, Bay City, Michigan
Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation, Mecosta, Michigan
Michigan Environmental Council (MEC), Lansing, Michigan
Michigan Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign/Voices for Earth Justice, Roseville, Michigan
Michigan Land Trustees, Bangor, Michigan
National Environmental Trust, Michigan Chapter, Lansing, Michigan
Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS), Evanston, Illinois
Nuclear-Free Great Lakes Campaign, Livonia, Michigan
Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS), Washington, D.C.
Nuclear Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C.
Nukewatch, Luck, Wisconsin
Palisades Conversion Group, South Haven, Michigan
Public Interest Research Group in Michigan (PIRGIM), Ann Arbor, Michigan
Radiological Evaluation & Action Project, Great Lakes (REAP-GL), Ewen, Michigan
Sierra Club, Michigan Chapter, Lansing, Michigan
Toledo Coalition for Safe Energy, Toledo, Ohio
Transformations Spirituality Center, Sisters of Saint Joseph, Nazareth, Michigan
WAND Michigan (Women's Action for New Directions), Southfield, Michigan
West Michigan Environmental Action Council, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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