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Nuclear Industry Under Fire as It Targets the South for Reactor Expansions

Atlanta, GA -- Consumer, public health, environmental, peace, security, social justice, and taxpayer organizations have united to protect the Southeast from further exploitation by the nuclear industry. Ignoring the historical price overruns, increased costs to consumers, threat of terrorism, and nuclear waste problems, every major utility in the Southeast is proposing to build a new nuclear reactor within the next five to ten years, independently or through a consortium. The nuclear consortium includes TVA, Duke Energy, Progress Energy, Entergy, Southern Company, Florida Power & Light and SCANA. Of the roughly 18 proposals, 13 are in the South. The groups vowed to confront these proposals that target the South, on behalf of their members, supporters, and communities affected by the nuclear resurgence.

A sampling of utility proposals to expand nuclear power in the Southeast includes:

- Southern Company’s plans to file for an Early Site Permit with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), perhaps as early as this month. It’s subsidiary, Georgia Power, is considering building up to two new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle in Georgia;
- The Tennessee Valley Authority’s (TVA) several sites for possible expansion, including their never-completed Bellefonte plant in Alabama that has cost TVA customers more than \$4 billion, a second reactor at Watts Bar in Tennessee, and restarting their troubled Browns Ferry Unit 1 reactor in Alabama that shutdown more than 20 years ago;
- Duke Energy’s plan to revive the Cherokee site near Spartanburg, SC, the Perkins site near Winston-Salem, NC, and possibly adding reactors at their Oconee plant in SC;
- Progress Energy’s proposal to add two new reactors at the Shearon Harris plant near Raleigh, NC, one of the most dangerous plants in the country and possibly more reactors in Florida.

“We need to remind the public of the enormous cost overruns that occurred building two nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle back in the 1980s for instance,” said Krista Brewer, President of Atlanta WAND, “History teaches us that nuclear expansion projections are woefully underestimated.”

Groups are working to bring energy efficiency and clean, safe energy solutions to the region, which can also play an important role in reducing global warming pollution. In North Carolina,

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organizations, including NCWARN and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, intervened before the state Utilities Commission and presented evidence that North Carolina's future energy demand can be met by aggressive energy efficiency measures and renewable energy, without new coal or nuclear plants.

“Our region is slated to become the nation's dumping ground for new nuclear reactors and their radioactive waste, leaving the health and wealth of our communities vulnerable,” said Sara Barczak, Safe Energy Director with Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. “The South needs a future built upon safe, affordable energy such as energy efficiency, wind, solar, and bioenergy.”

Legal challenges by Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and others have provided experience in the new permitting processes developed by the NRC. Although the new procedures were developed to fast track the licensing of new reactors and weaken public review, the NRC has not yet made any final decisions on the three Early Site applications that have been submitted for by Exelon, Entergy, and Dominion. Though many utilities have stated that they are considering applying for Combined Construction and Operating Licenses, none have been filed thus far.

“Determined legal resistance in communities targeted for nuclear plants will continue to be an important part of our strategy,” said Lou Zeller, campaigner for Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. He added, “Legal challenges center on issues vital to our public education program; public education on the downside of nuclear power leads to community mobilization against these nuclear dinosaurs.”

New nuclear power plants will worsen the present nuclear waste crisis, especially in the Southeast. A new plan to reprocess nuclear waste being pushed by the Bush Administration, under a controversial program called the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP), could bring high-level nuclear waste from all over the United States, and even the world, to the Southeast. WAND, NIRS, and those closely following GNEP expressed alarm that reprocessing would likely occur at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina along the border with Georgia.

“The nation's high-level nuclear waste may be moved into our region to a ‘parking lot’ dump in South Carolina, since Wall Street is not likely to invest in new reactors unless the burden of high-liability radioactive waste is removed from these sites,” said Mary Olson, Director of the Southeast NIRS office in Asheville, North Carolina. “Reprocessing only makes matters worse: expanding waste volume with no reduction in radiation while resulting in purified plutonium—a serious nuclear proliferation hazard.”

The groups have teamed up with utility experts and economists to offer briefings to the financial community, highlighting the exorbitant costs of nuclear power and the risks associated with the attempt to revive nuclear power. Presentations were given to Wall Street investors by Peter Bradford, former Chair of the New York State Public Service Commission and Maine Public Utilities Commission and former Commissioner of the NRC, and David Schlissel with Synapse Energy Economics, Inc. Access the briefing summary “Why a Future for the Nuclear Industry is Risky” at www.cleanenergy.org/resources/pubs.cfm#sace.