

NUCLEAR INFORMATION AND RESOURCE SERVICE

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STATEMENT OF NIRS ON SOUTH TEXAS REACTOR APPLICATION

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NEW REACTORS IN SOUTH TEXAS WOULD SET U.S. ENERGY POLICY ON MISGUIDED COURSE

Today, NRG Energy said it is submitting an application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build two new reactors at its South Texas nuclear site. This is the first full application for a new reactor in the U.S. in more than 30 years.

This project is emblematic of the failures of U.S. energy policy to effectively meet the needs of our nation. Nuclear power is a 20th century technology in a new world of climate crisis and a future that demands a distributed, sustainable approach to energy. Nuclear power requires massive taxpayer subsidies and yet still cannot compete environmentally with the sustainable energy technologies that will power our future.

NRG Energy already has been quoted in the media (*Washington Post*, September 25, 2007) as saying that “the whole reason” the company is considering new nuclear reactors is taxpayer subsidies provided by Congress and the Bush Administration in the 2005 Energy Policy Act. These multi-billion dollar subsidies include taxpayer loan guarantees for new reactors, tax credits for the first six reactors built, the Price-Anderson Act limitation of utility liability for nuclear accidents, and “risk insurance” to cover possible delays in the licensing process.

Without taxpayer support, no utility would build a new atomic reactor, and no financial institution would invest in a new reactor.

Moreover, the NRG Energy application would repeat one of the fundamental mistakes of the first generation of nuclear power: the construction of nuclear reactors without a feasible facility or plan for storage of the lethal radioactive waste the reactor would produce. The Yucca Mountain, Nevada, radioactive waste dump is on its last legs, and appears increasingly unlikely to ever open. Even if it did, a new round of nuclear construction would necessitate construction of another radioactive waste dump as well—something no state in the country likely would accept. After 50 years, one would think the lesson would have been learned: building atomic reactors without a scientifically-sound waste plan is folly.

Texas is blessed with enormous potential for wind and solar power, while aggressive energy efficiency programs remain the cheapest, fastest and cleanest method of addressing both electricity demand and the need to quickly reduce carbon emissions. Construction of new reactors in Texas would divert the resources needed to implement those efficiency programs and help solar and wind reach their full potential—to the detriment of Texans and all Americans. A recent study from American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (summarized at <http://www.nirs.org/alternatives/sestudy10.pdf>) shows that Texas can meet all forecasted energy demand through energy efficiency and sustainable energy technologies.

Both Texas and the United States deserve better than a greedy utility feasting at the taxpayer trough to build another large polluting power plant. We expect Texans to oppose the NRG Energy project, and we expect to help Texans with their opposition.