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Project On Government Oversight

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Project On Government Oversight Statement on NRC Investigation into Security Failures at Peach Bottom Nuclear Power Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) released the findings of its investigation into allegations that on-duty guards were caught sleeping at the Peach Bottom nuclear power plant at a public meeting October 9, 2007. According to news media reports, the NRC confirmed that there were "multiple occasions" when security officers were inattentive to their duties.

Unanswered by the news reports is why those officers were so exhausted. The Project On Government Oversight's nuclear power plant investigations have repeatedly found that post-9/11, security contractors including Wackenhut overwork security officers to the point of exhaustion. POGO's reports have found security officers working as much as six 12-hour days on a regular basis. It is almost impossible for security officers to perform their duties under these conditions over the long term. The late former NRC Commissioner Edward McGaffigan wrote and championed NRC rules that attempted to reign in such abuses. Those rules were revamped again earlier this year following irrefutable evidence that the industry was gaming the new rules.

Also unanswered is why the NRC failed to respond to whistleblower disclosures made six months ago regarding the sleeping security officers as revealed recently by CBS News. Furthermore, current NRC inquiries are now directed at subpoenas to obtain access to the whistleblowers' computers.

Peter Stockton, lead investigator for POGO, attended the public meeting at the plant last night and described the "hard-hitting" NRC investigation as follows: "The way the NRC conducted the investigation of these very serious allegations was to go first to Wackenhut and say, 'Do you have any sleeping guards down there at Peach Bottom?' The answer was 'nah.' Then, they went to Exelon, 'Got any sleeping guards at Peach Bottom?' Same answer."

POGO remains dissatisfied with the NRC explanation about the number of hours the guards worked. Several people at the hearing last evening spoke to this issue. Indeed,

the former head of the security force pointed out that guards are regularly overworked. Given POGO's experience with the NRC and their calculations of work sheets, the public needs to remain focused on the implications of homeland security and an exhausted nuclear security force.

"NRC Region 1 has repeatedly failed to ensure that security contractors honestly abide by rules to protect security officers from grueling 70-80 hour work weeks, intolerable conditions that harm their ability to be fit for duty," said Danielle Brian, Executive Director of POGO. "The real issue is one of management and training and not individuals trying to make a decent living in an environment of fear."

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Founded in 1981, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) is an independent nonprofit that investigates and exposes corruption and other misconduct in order to achieve a more accountable federal government.