Anti-nuclear groups ask Governor Baker to be proactive about Pilgrim
Letter asks guv to consider three points about Plymouth nuclear facility

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Cape Downwinders, Pilgrim Watch and Jones River Watershed Association sent a letter to Governor Charlie Baker urging him to be proactive about the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant in Plymouth.

The letter opens by referring to a June 2014 correspondence between then Chair of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission Allison Macfarlane and then Gov. Deval Patrick. Macfarlane’s letter was in response to a letter from the governor in which he expressed concern about the “evacuation plan for surrounding communities if a major event were to occur at Pilgrim” and a recent assessment of Pilgrim’s performance conducted by the NRC. Although Macfarlane assured Patrick that Pilgrim’s evacuation plan was tested and deemed adequate and that the areas in which Pilgrim was dinged on an assessment were being addressed, she wrote, "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has the overall authority for making protective action decisions (e.g. sheltering and evacuation) to ensure the safety of Massachusetts residents during a radiological event," Macfarlane further stated, "In addition, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency maintains the FEMA-approved State Radiological Emergency Plan for implementing those decisions. Therefore, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a significant role in determining the adequacy of Pilgrim’s Emergency Preparedness Program."

According to the four groups, a recent NRC inspection report and unplanned shutdowns or scrams that have occurred at Pilgrim should have Governor Baker concerned. The groups were referring to two performance indicators sliding from green to yellow in the Initiating Events cornerstone, Unplanned Scrams per 7000 Critical Hours and Unplanned Scrams with Complications in a supplemental inspection completed in December 2014. The NRC’s findings were outlined in a letter to Pilgrim dated January 28, 2015 (see below), one day before Pilgrim went offline in a blizzard.

In the early morning hours of January 27 during the 2015 blizzard dubbed "Juno", Pilgrim was taken offline when the two main power transmission lines were knocked out. The storm-related shutdown prompted a visit from an NRC special investigation team. At the time, NRC Regional 1 Administrator Dan Dorman said, "The Pilgrim reactor was safely shut down. Nevertheless, we want to examine more closely the challenges that surfaced during the event, including safety system and equipment problems and the loss of the two off-site power lines."

The results of the post-Juno inspection are expected to be released in Mid March. At that time, the four groups have requested a
sit-down with the governor to discuss the results.

In the meantime, the group has asked Governor Baker to take three "specific actions":

1. Mandate precautionary shutdowns when a severe storm is likely.
2. Seek input from citizens and local officials on Pilgrim's Radiological Emergency Plan and Procedures before signing off on said plan each year.
3. Support legislation (currently pending in the legislature) that would establish a decommissioning trust fund at no cost to the commonwealth, should the federal fund be insufficient.

Entergy, the Louisiana-based company that owns Pilgrim responded Tuesday to the three "specific actions" in the letter.

"We already take precautionary steps in advance of storms," said Entergy Senior Communications Specialist Lauren Burm. In anticipation of a second 2015 blizzard on Valentine's weekend, Pilgrim was taken offline. "In accordance with plant procedures, Pilgrim's management decided to take the plant off line. The plant remained safe and secure during the storm, and all offsite power sources remained reliably connected to the plant," Burm said.

Regarding evacuation and emergency planning, Burm said, "Years of analysis went into the initial selection of a 10-mile zone, and additional years of study by the NRC have determined that it is the appropriate size to ensure public safety. State and federal agencies are responsible for developing the evacuation plans, and Pilgrim is working with them to ensure we have the best possible plans."

Burm said Entergy has programs and policies to address the legislative proposals, but will "take a close look and consider their merits."

The letter to Governor Baker was signed by Mary Lampert of Pilgrim Watch, Pine duBois of Jones River Watershed Association, Arlene Williamson of Pilgrim Coalition and Diane Turco of Cape Downwinders. In addition to the governor's office, the letter was sent to Senate President Stanley Rosenberg, State Senator Vinny deMacedo, Representative Tom Calter, EEA Secretary Matthew Beaton, the Plymouth Board of Selectmen and Aaron Wallace, Director of the Town of Plymouth Office of Emergency Management.

Read the full text of the letter to Governor Baker here. Read the full text of the letter from MacFarlane to Patrick here. Read the NRC letter to Pilgrim dates January 26, 2015 here.

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