



PILGRIM STATION: What to ask about casks

Is the town willing to give Entergy a blank check?

By Frank Mand

Wicked Local Plymouth

Posted Jun 04, 2013 @ 06:00 PM

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What's this?

PLYMOUTH — Most of the critics of Entergy and its Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant would, if pressed, admit that the plant's closure is their ultimate goal. But they insist that has little to do with their conviction that the town should require Entergy to get a special permit to build dry cask storage (or an Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation) on its grounds in Manomet.

Those critics argue that the town's regulations require a special permit for this massive construction project. And they say the town would be giving away all control over this project – and unnecessarily subjecting the community to safety risks and financial hardships down the road – if it accepts the decision of the director of inspectional services to allow that construction without a special permit and public hearing.

To make that point, and more, a coalition of organizations recently held a community forum, during which the groups tried to explain 1) why Entergy needs this facility in the first place, 2) what the risks associated with Entergy's existing plans are, and 3) the basis of the legal appeal of the permit decision made by Director of Inspectional Services Paul McAuliffe.

What's the rush?

Entergy needs this facility because without it Pilgrim will have to cease operations, EcoLaw Attorney Meg Sheehan explained.

The place where the plant presently stores spent fuel-rod assemblies – the so-called “spent fuel pool” housed at the top of the reactor building – is running out of space.

Designed for less than 1,000 of these assemblies, Pilgrim's spent fuel pool now houses more than 3,000.

Critics say spent fuel pools are dangerous and cite their part in the Fukushima disaster to bolster arguments for alternative forms of storage, including dry cask storage.

But Entergy has acknowledged it is not planning to build dry cask storage because of safety concerns; it's strictly a financial decision. That's why the company is not expected to immediately construct all the dry cask units it will eventually need (more than 100). Instead, Entergy plans to build a smaller number and transfer the spent-fuel assemblies as needed.

Because financial concerns are a primary motivation for constructing dry cask storage, Sheehan said, the construction plans include other decisions that may not be in the town's best interest.

That's where Pilgrim Watch Founder Mary Lampert's part of the forum began.

My way or the highway?

Lampert explained some of the risks associated with building this storage installation Entergy's way, as opposed, Lampert said, to the right way.

First, she acknowledged, the existing spent-fuel pool is a safety risk and dry cask storage could and should be a better alternative. But just transferring the fuel to these units is not the answer, Lampert said. Entergy's plan to maintain a high density of assemblies in its spent-fuel pool is wrong, Lampert insisted. It could and should transfer all of the assemblies (save for those too “hot” to transfer) to dry cask storage within five years.

If Entergy plans to squeeze in as many dry cask units as possible onto the pad it plans to construct, creating what Lampert called “candlepin bowling for terrorists,” then protecting those units from attack or flood is critical.

There are no plans for the casks to include monitoring systems to make sure they are not leaking radiation and vents are not blocked (something that has happened at other facilities), she added.

The town also needs to be assured that replacement casks or, in the case of compromised casks, “over-packs” are readily available, if needed.

And Lampert and others are mystified by Entergy's choice of a location for the first cask pad, when the company has 1,600 acres to choose from.

The location of the pad was the cue for the next presentation, by Jones River Watershed Association Executive Director Pine duBois.

A rising tide

DuBois displayed a series of topographical maps that purported to show the height of the land in and around the nuclear power plant on Rocky Hill Road.

She argued that climate change is having a discernible effect in this area and, coupled with the fact that the pad Entergy is building is in an area only 24 feet above sea level, will make its casks, which vent at the bottom, unnecessarily susceptible to flooding.

The pad and the casks, duBois argued, should be on higher ground. And just a “stone’s throw away” from the proposed site, she said, the ground rises 50 or more feet above sea level.

“They need a better plan, at a higher spot,” duBois said. “They need to plan for the worst case scenario, not the least cost scenario.”

A little leverage?

Attorney Jim Lampert, Mary Lampert’s husband, then spoke about EcoLaw’s legal appeal of McAuliffe’s decision.

Jim said he thinks the law is on the Coalition’s side.

McAuliffe’s decision was based on incorrect information from town counsel, he explained. Neither the dry-cask storage units or the plant, itself, are an allowed use in a light industrial zone.

The plant is there because a special permit was granted.

If the town decides or is forced by the courts to ask Entergy to go through the special permit process, two positive things will happen, he said.

First, residents will be able to attend a hearing and comment on the record about Entergy’s ISFSI plans and the plans will be open to public scrutiny.

And, second, the Zoning Board of Appeals will be able to add conditions to that permit.

“The only way that the town will have any leverage with Entergy on this issue is if they are required to obtain a special permit,” he said.

Going forward

The next step will be the June 12 meeting of the ZBA, at which it will decide how to proceed.

That meeting, Jim Lampert stressed, will not be the time and place for critics to make ancillary arguments about safety, flood zones and the like. While he would like to see concerned citizens attend, the meeting will be a review of the pertinent bylaws.

If, as critics expect, the ZBA rejects their arguments and accepts McAuliffe’s decision, EcoLaw will likely appeal that decision to the Superior Court of Land Court, with the expectation of a decision in mid-September.

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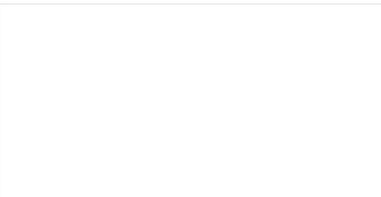
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They all complain that the spent fuel pool is too full and is a danger, however when Entergy attempts to move forward with the dry cask storage, this doesn’t appease the hippies either. Amazing!! I say truck the rods right up to Deluxbury to Mary Lampert’s front yard and then leave them there without security. Oh yeah, everyone break out your topographical maps, because apparently all those homes on the same side as Entergy on Rocky Hill Road aren’t out of harms way of plunging into the water....hysteria gets you nowhere people.

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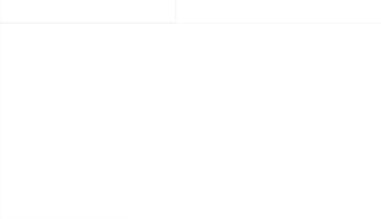
Entergy isn't building dry cask's to appease the people, it's doing it because the spent fuel pool is loaded up with spent rods and can't fit anymore. And they will only move a little at a time.

All these people are trying to do is ensure the dry cask is built as structurally sound and safe as possible, and be transparent with the process. Entergy will do as any for PROFIT company will do, and do things as cheaply as possible, which is why you need some outside input into this. Last I checked this isn't Russia, although we seem headed in that direction. Since Obama killed Yucca mountain, were going to have to have all this garbage here in Plymouth making us a nuclear waste site indefinitely. That was not what our forefathers had in mind when they signed up to host a nuke plant. So we should get the Cadillac of storage facilities.

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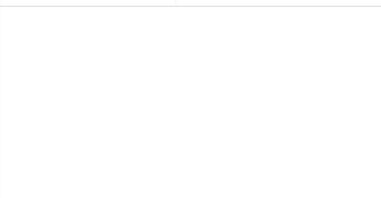
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Thank you...can't agree more.

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this town is astounding, you have a old nuclear plant with tons of waste, you build nothing but box stores all over the place get what you deserve really stupid people running this town into the ground,



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