

By Mary Lampert

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OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: Is Plymouth prepared to lose its cash cow?

Pilgrim won't live forever. It's time to get serious about planning for life without Pilgrim.

Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station has been a Plymouth "cash cow" for more than 40 years. But Pilgrim won't live forever. It's time to get serious about planning for life without Pilgrim.

What is "decommissioning?"

After Pilgrim closes, it will be what is called "decommissioned." This calls for removing the radioactivity from Pilgrim's site so it can be put to a productive use – except for all the spent nuclear fuel that will remain until it can be sent to some offsite federal repository.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) allows two principal methods of decommissioning: DECON (decontamination; immediate dismantlement), and SAFSTOR (safe storage; delayed dismantlement, or mothballing). SAFSTOR may delay dismantling until 50-55 years after a reactor shuts down; however decommissioning must be completed 60 years after a reactor shuts down.

In 2008, Entergy told the NRC that it likely would SAFSTOR Pilgrim. Entergy is using SAFSTOR at its Vermont Yankee nuclear power reactor. The reason is that it does not have enough money put aside to do the job now.

During SAFSTOR, most workers will be let go, cut to a skeleton staff; workers with specific knowledge of Pilgrim's specific problems will retire; Entergy's contributions to the state for environmental monitoring, payments to Plymouth for emergency planning and donations to local groups and charities will disappear.

How much will decommissioning cost?

In 2014, Entergy told the NRC that the estimated cost to decommission Yankee Atomic would be more than \$1.243 billion. There is good reason to expect that decommissioning Pilgrim, that is larger than Vermont Yankee, will cost at least \$100 million, perhaps half a billion dollars more.

The \$896.42 million dollars that was in Pilgrim's Decommissioning Trust Fund at the end of 2014 is at least half a billion, and perhaps more than a billion, dollars less than will be needed to decommission the Pilgrim site.

Who will pay, and what if there is not enough money?

Pilgrim's owner should pay, but it is a limited liability company. There are no other guaranteed Entergy assets to pay for cleanup costs. Entergy refused to guarantee Vermont that Entergy would pay for decommissioning after Vermont Yankee's planned SAFSTOR period.

Unless there is enough money in Pilgrim's Decommissioning Trust Fund, Pilgrim's owner and operator may leave Massachusetts (including Plymouth) taxpayers holding the bag. Connecticut ratepayers had to pay a \$480 million shortfall for cleanup of Connecticut Yankee.

The potential of Massachusetts having to pick-up the bill is increased if Entergy again tries to "raid" its decommissioning fund to meet expenses that have nothing to do with cleaning up Pilgrim. Entergy wants to use the Vermont Yankee's already inadequate Decommissioning Trust Fund to pay \$600,000 in local taxes, security costs to guard the spent fuel on site through 2050, for the transfer of the spent fuel from the pool to dry casks, and worker retirement costs. Massachusetts cannot assume that Entergy will not try to do the same thing here.

What can Plymouth do?

Citizens and elected local and state officials should support Massachusetts Senate Bill 1798 – An Act establishing funding to provide moneys for postclosure activities at nuclear power stations, filed by Sen. Dan Wolf in this year's legislative session. The Act would require Pilgrim to pay an annual \$25million post-closure funding fee into a trust fund in the office of the State Treasurer to insure that, after Pilgrim shuts down, there will be money available for a complete and timely decommissioning. After a reactor has been completely decommissioned, any excess in the fund will be returned to the plant owner, with interest.

One goal of the bill is have the money to begin dismantlement immediately and to soften any economic blow to Plymouth that might result from Pilgrim's closure. If the money is there and dismantlement begins when Pilgrim closes, hundreds of workers will be brought into the community for five-10 years, spending money in Plymouth and the region to help cushion the blow from losing its cash cow.

Contact your legislators and the Legislature's Joint Committee on Telecommunications. Ask them to support the bill and ask your friends and other elected officials to do likewise.

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