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By Karen Vale

[Print Page](#)

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OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: A growing movement

Since the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 and the relicensing of Pilgrim in 2012, the movement to end operations at Pilgrim (or to ensure that certain standards are met at the facility) has seemingly gained momentum. Grassroots groups throughout southern New England have sprouted up or expanded, and communities farther and farther from the source are starting to recognize that the risks posed by Pilgrim could impact them too.

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For example, in 2013 all 15 towns on Cape Cod were able to get a nonbinding ballot question or a town meeting warrant article passed about the nuclear facility. The effort, led by the Cape Downwinders, gave citizens the opportunity to vote yes on a statement asking Governor Patrick to call upon the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to shut down Pilgrim based on safety concerns. Governor Patrick sent his letter to the NRC in March 2014.

Martha's Vineyard is now following suit. A small group called 350MVI (a subset of the larger 350.org organization) successfully presented the "Pilgrim Resolution" for a vote at town meetings and on several town election ballots in 2014. The resolution was nearly identical to that voted on by the 15 Cape Cod towns. The votes to support the closing of Pilgrim in five of six towns (Aquinnah, Chilmark, Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven, and West Tisbury) were nearly unanimous. The Board of Selectmen in Edgartown submitted a letter to Governor Patrick stating its support of the resolution in lieu of including it at their town meeting. In addition, the Dukes County Commission (Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands) just recently endorsed the call to close Pilgrim because they believe the safety of their residents cannot be assured.

Bristol County District Attorney Sam Sutter has also been outspoken on the issue, since most of Bristol County falls within the 50-mile inhalation pathway zone around Pilgrim. DA Sutter hosts a monthly television show called "In the Spotlight," and he recently dedicated two of his shows to Pilgrim-related topics. He is continuing to speak out and raise awareness about public safety risks and lack of evacuation plans that would impact people in Bristol County.

Lastly, in early June the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science held a portion of its northeast regional conference in Kingston. The conference focused on local environmental issues, including impacts from Pilgrim on Cape Cod Bay. Participants ranging from technologists, designers, social scientists and community organizers – from New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Louisiana, and Oregon (and some of our own from Boston and western Massachusetts) – engaged in research and tool development around the issue.

This growing interest and involvement has been referred to as a "turning tide" or a "mood change" by some. Whatever you want to label it, let it be an inspiration to you and your own town to get involved and invest in a movement that will continue to grow and produce results in the near future.

Karen Vale is the campaign manager at Plymouth-based Cape Cod Bay Watch, a program of the Jones River Watershed Association that works on issues of degradation and harm to marine life in Cape Cod Bay.

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[Print Page](#)