

By Karen Vale
Cape Cod Bay Watch

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OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: New Pilgrim maps reveal need for accuracy

Entergy is due to provide a flood risk assessment for its Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station by March 12 to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Entergy is due to provide a flood risk assessment for its Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station by March 12 to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). This will be one day after the four-year anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. The Fukushima accident was the motivation behind the NRC's order requiring U.S. facilities to reassess risks to natural hazards such as flooding.

In our view, the information and maps that Entergy has provided in the past to the NRC and the public have been misleading and inaccurate, and downplay the risk level at the Pilgrim site. There is concern that the flood risk assessment due to the NRC on March 12 will follow suit.

Earlier this month, the Jones River Watershed Association (JRWA) requested that the NRC require Entergy to carry out a thorough and accurate on-site survey at Pilgrim in order to provide the best information possible regarding its flooding vulnerability. The request calls for Entergy to use the most updated methodology and data on sea level rise and influences by tides, storms, waves and wind.

Otherwise, the assessment Energy presents to the NRC March 12 will be useless.

JRWA, in conjunction with Northeastern Geospatial Research Professionals, recently developed a straightforward elevation analysis of the Pilgrim site using publicly available information (full report and maps are can be viewed at www.jonesriver.org). The analysis calls into question the topographical elevations for critical infrastructure portrayed on Entergy's maps.

For example, Pilgrim's protective jetties and other areas of the site are lower than shown on Entergy's maps. In addition, their site plans also mix old and new standards (NGVD29 and NADV88), which leads to a misleading interpretation of the information. Furthermore, Pilgrim's site design dates back to the 1960s, when mean sea level was about six inches lower than it is today. These types of inconsistencies will impact how the facility is managed to withstand sea level rise, storm surge, flooding, wave action and other natural hazards on the site.

The recent complications and shutdown experienced by Pilgrim due to winter storm "Juno" underlined the need for a risk assessment more than ever. The implications for not understanding the risks at Pilgrim could include increased physical damage and disruption, including to personnel engaged in proposed and current emergency response actions and plans. Until an accurate site survey and assessment is done – and subsequent mitigation measures are carried out by Entergy and the NRC – we can only expect more complications and shutdowns at Pilgrim in the future.

Karen Vale is program manager for Cape Cod Bay Watch, a program of the Jones River Watershed Association.

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