

OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: What does it take for you to close Pilgrim?

Thursday

Posted at 6:00 AM

An open letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission

By Mary Lampert and James Lampert

Several years ago you ranked Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station as one of the three least safe reactors in the country. That ranking has not changed, and Pilgrim continues to get worse. Your own reports show that nothing has improved.

After inspecting Pilgrim last January, you expressed concern about Pilgrim's consistent failure to correct known problems. Although Entergy had known about it a year earlier, Pilgrim had not fixed a leak in a system that cools the reactor.

After your second special inspection in April, you reported similar maintenance-related concerns. Pilgrim plant personnel had long known that there were problems with the bearing on the pumps that Pilgrim uses to draw millions of gallons of seawater from Cape Cod Bay into the plant to cool the reactor. The problems were never addressed, and one of the pumps broke down.

A third special inspection started last month and is still under way. In December, the head of your team conducting the inspection said that Entergy's management had allowed an ineffective safety culture "that a lot of talking probably won't fix," and that Pilgrim has a "team of employees who appear to be struggling with keeping the nuclear plant running." His list of specific failures is frightening:

n Plant workers fail to follow established industry procedures.

n Broken equipment never gets properly fixed.

n Plant "experts" lack required expertise.

n Staff members who do not understand their roles and responsibilities.

n "The corrective actions in the recovery plan seem to have been hastily developed and implemented, and some have been circumvented as they were deemed too hard to complete."

In addition to what you said in your reports, the list of safety issues and problems you know about goes on:

n Pilgrim is 44 years old and needs effective on-going maintenance. But because Pilgrim is losing money Entergy has been unwilling to invest in the reactor. Entergy's policy is to wait until something breaks, and then maybe fix it.

n In 2016 alone, Pilgrim reported 18 mechanical failures - sometimes more than one a month. Many of these resulted from Entergy's failure to make known needed repairs.

n You have said that there are "relatively high probabilities that ...; containments [like Pilgrim's] will fail should an accident progress to melting the core."

n You required Pilgrim to put "fixes" into place at least partially to address lessons learned from Fukushima. With your encouragement, Entergy is trying to wriggle out of complying.

n Pilgrim's spent fuel pool is subject to a catastrophic fire. The fuel is too tightly packed and you know that the boron panels separating assemblies stored in the pool needed to prevent criticality are degrading.

n Pilgrim's safety systems depend on outside electric power to operate. Degraded equipment, severe storms, and cyberattacks mean that electric reliability is far from assured.

You also know the potential consequences of an accident:

n In 2013 you estimated that a spent fuel fire at Pilgrim could contaminate 6,693 square miles. According to nuclear security experts at Princeton University, your estimate was embarrassingly low. They found that 38,610 square miles could be contaminated.

n A 2006 study conducted for the Massachusetts attorney general estimated a spent fuel pool fire at Pilgrim would result in \$488 billion in damage and 24,000 cancers.

n Evacuation plans are inadequate.

n Home insurance does not cover nuclear disasters.

How long will you continue to ignore what you know? How long will you allow a failed plant like Pilgrim to continue to operate?

Enough is enough. Pilgrim has proved that it will not recognize its responsibilities to the public. It is high time that you recognized yours, and ordered Pilgrim to be closed.

Mary Lampert is director of Pilgrim Watch and co-chairman of the Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee, and supports the work of local citizen groups such as Pilgrim Coalition and Cape Cod Bay Watch. James Lampert is an attorney and member of Pilgrim Watch and the Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee.