



OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: Should Pilgrim shutdown wait until 2019?

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Numerous equipment malfunctions and shutdowns at Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in the past two months have only underlined why the Nuclear Regulatory Commission should not wait for it to shut down on its own accord in 2019.

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Numerous equipment malfunctions and shutdowns at Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in the past two months have only underlined why the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) should not wait for it to shut down on its own accord in 2019. Problems including too-warm ocean water, valve malfunctions, a hydrogen leak, and falsified reporting have plagued Pilgrim since August. The plant was shut down for nearly two weeks in September, and was back to full power status on Sept. 19.

To top it off, Entergy, Pilgrim's owner, recently requested an extension to implement critical safety upgrades at Pilgrim plant until December 2019 – more than two years after the NRC's deadline for compliance, and about six months after Pilgrim's scheduled closure. After the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, and since Pilgrim is the same design as the Fukushima reactors, the NRC recommended a series of safety upgrades, including installation of "hardened containment vents." These vents would help prevent radioactive release if an accident were to occur. In late September, the Massachusetts Legislative

Delegation, including Senators Markey and Warren and a long list of congressional representatives, called on the NRC to reject Entergy's extension request.

In addition to obvious concerns raised by recent events it is also important to remember that Pilgrim is due to refuel its reactor this spring, meaning more high-level nuclear waste will be placed in an already-crowded spent fuel pool. More waste that will also end up, eventually, in dry cask storage on the Cape Cod Bay shoreline. These casks, made of concrete and steel, are currently sited in a location well within reach of rising seas, nor'easters, and salt water degradation.

In a 2015 interview, Mr. Arnie Gunderson, a former nuclear industry executive and currently with Fairewinds Energy Education, said, "You build power plants near water because you have to cool them, and you build nuclear waste storage sites away from water" due to risks of radioactive contamination.

It is unknown how long these precariously-placed casks will stay in Plymouth. Right now the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is in the process of developing "consent-based siting" plans for more permanent storage solutions in collaboration with communities across the country. However, solutions are a long way away and no saying the process will even be successful.

The reality is that Plymouth is host to an operating nuclear power plant that is categorized by the NRC as one of the three least safe reactors in the country, as well as a large stockpile of high-level nuclear waste for an indefinite amount of time. It is time for the NRC to grab the reins and prohibit refueling from moving forward this spring. Furthermore, the NRC and our elected officials should do everything in their power to ensure Pilgrim's dry casks are moved further away from Cape Cod Bay before even more casks are filled.

Decommissioning and site cleanup should be implemented sooner, not delayed so Pilgrim can refuel and limp into Plymouth's 400th anniversary holding a specter over residents, visitors, and the environment in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Karen Vale-Vasilev manages Jones River Watershed Association's (JRWA) Cape Cod Bay Watch program. JRWA has its offices on the banks of the river in Kingston, eight miles from Pilgrim.