



## **OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: NRC came, saw, but did not conquer**

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By Karen Vale-Vasilev

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission came to Plymouth last month to placate concerns raised by an internal memo about Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station that was mistakenly emailed to the public.

The memo provided a rare, candid glimpse of what was going on inside the plant during one of the NRC's biggest on-site inspections. It outlined corrective actions not properly developed or addressed, issues of non-compliance, poor maintenance, equipment unreliability problems, and a "...safety culture problem that a bunch of talking probably won't fix."

At the hearing, NRC staff walked the audience through the memo and indicated that 10-15 violations would be issued to Pilgrim's owner, Entergy, when the final inspection report is complete. It is important to note that the recent NRC inspection only covered about 15 percent or less of Pilgrim's systems. The additional violations will not be, explained the NRC, enough to move Pilgrim to "Column 5" (mandatory shutdown). Instead, Pilgrim is likely to remain in Column 4, continuing to operate until the planned 2019 shutdown date and under continued enhanced scrutiny by the federal regulators.

The NRC also announced that Pilgrim would be refueling in the spring, spurring audible outrage from many of the 300 attendees at the hearing. A long line of speakers expressed frustration and concerns to the NRC, almost all asking the agency to shut down the plant sooner than the planned closure in 2019. The NRC certainly saw them, and we are hopeful that they truly listened.

Pilgrim is one of the three worst operating reactors in the country, owned by the company with the worst record. All three reactors in Column 4 are owned by Entergy. Comparatively, the nuclear industry as a whole operates more than 90 percent of its reactors in Column 1, or at the highest level of safety performance. It is not normal for a company to have any reactors in Column 4, let alone so many. This seems to point to a systemic problem within Entergy.

Based on Pilgrim's continued placement in Column 4 and the issues raised in the internal email, Pilgrim is struggling, as it has been for some time. Problems seem to be getting worse, with even less incentive to fix problems as we get closer to the planned closure date. For everyone's sake, it is time for the NRC to prohibit the spring refuel and require shutdown sooner than 2019.

We commend the efforts of our Massachusetts governor, attorney general, and state and federal delegations, which convinced the NRC to hold the hearing. However, testimony provided by some staffers indicated that they are only requesting more regulatory oversight at Pilgrim and not asking for shutdown. Pilgrim should have closed in 2012, and it has been under enhanced federal oversight for years. More oversight is not what is needed. It is time that all of our elected officials demand refueling be prohibited and shutdown be enforced before 2019.

While the public hearing was disappointing on many levels, it also seemed to motivate local citizens. The NRC returns to Plymouth in late March to present the full results of its inspection, and these motivated citizens will be ready for them.

Un-Plug Pilgrim.

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