

From: Chad Simpson <chad_simpson@comporium.net>
 To: <opa2@nrc.gov>
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Below is the result of your feedback form. It was submitted by

Chad Simpson (chad_simpson@comporium.net) on Wednesday, August 11, 2004 at 00:26:14

comments:
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 69 FR 4185-2
 (2)*

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Dr. Nils J. Diaz, Chairman
 U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
 Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Dr. Diaz:

Plutonium is the bomb, as I understand it. The big one. Actually, I suppose it's the fuel for the bomb, but when we're talking about what is arguably one of the most toxic substances known to humanity, coupled with what can be inarguably its most horrific weapon of mass destruction, who are we to split a few hairs?

We are, after all, only owners of front-row seats to the U.S.-debut of MOX, which is coming soon to a nuclear reactor nearby. Its fans say that it's all the rage in France, where power producers have been burning the blended fuel in their reactors for years. Its critics contend that even moving plutonium, much less burning it, is unnecessarily risky.

So, who's right? And, honestly, who cares?

Well, I care. But I hardly have the time. Much less the expertise to comprehend highly technical reports about its potential pluses or pitfalls. I most certainly don't have the chutzpa to attend an afternoon hearing in Charlotte to ask my dumb questions and voice my petty concerns in the elite company of government regulators, professional engineers, spokespersons and lawyers who know infinitely more than I do about burning MOX in general, and about burning it at the Catawba Nuclear Power Station, in particular.

Although it is a complicated issue, I'll be the first to admit that I have not been as proactive as I should to adequately educate myself enough to feel that I, as a citizen, have given my informed consent to the federal government to allow Duke Energy to begin experimental testing of the fuel at Catawba as early as next year.

But with the federal government, specifically, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, poised to shut the door on public comment August 12, I fear that my right as a citizen to speak up and have my voice heard in the halls of government is about to expire. And I choose to exercise that right before it does.

I ask, simply, that the NRC continue accepting, and hopefully even considering, public comment on the plan until it has conducted its final inspections and issued its final approvals for the completed MOX fuel assembly. I understand that Duke and others need the NRC's approval now, as reassurance for their own investments to get the plan off the ground. But I ask that the NRC leave the public record open, at least until this plan makes its way through the public process – if not here, then in other parts of the nation and world.

*E-RIDS = ADM-03
 Cdr = D.L. Clarke (D03)
 R.E. Martin (REM)*

Template = ADM-013

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I am not outright opposed to Duke's proposal. It appears to have merits, such as presenting a long-term source of fossil-fuel-free energy, as well as a certain kind of honor, in helping the federal government get out of colossal fix: what to do with – not only its own arsenal of old plutonium bombs – but also those of its former nemesis, Russia? Few other places in the nation or the world will allow such materials to be buried anywhere near them, much less burned inside of a reactor adjacent to their water supply.

Granted, MOX consists of only 5 % plutonium, and its proponents say that part of its appeal is that it cannot be used as fuel in a nuclear bomb. But it doesn't take a genius to figure out that forty pounds of dynamite and a couple of pounds of MOX would make a pretty big mess nonetheless.

Trust me when I tell you that it is easy to trust Duke's steady hand at the wheel of the Catawba Nuclear Power Station. I have visited the Station on school field trips. I have known a number of people who have worked there. I covered it as a reporter for the local newspaper several years ago. By all accounts, Duke appears to run a tight ship at Catawba, with people who live, play and volunteer in communities around the Station.

But what about all of those other people who will be involved in the MOX plan? The Russians? The French? Is it just as easy to trust them? I don't know. Is it just as easy to trust the federal government, or perhaps its private contractors, to ensure that the Catawba Station does not become a glowing red bulls-eye for American-hating terrorists? I don't know.

I do know that one of the lessons we all should have learned from the attacks on 9-11 is that it is not the nightmares we can imagine that end up haunting us. I also know (as do CSX and Wal-Mart) that democracy – passionate, thoughtful and sometimes painful democracy – is alive and well around these parts.

I ask the NRC to continue accepting public comment beyond Aug. 12. Let the democratic process work. Continue listening to the voices of dissent – or at least recording them – until everyone else who needs to has signed off on this plan. What difference could it possibly make?

Frankly, I want to know more about the plan. Preferably in plain English, and in either a local venue or in one that is not right in the middle of normal working hours.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chad Simpson

cc:/ U.S. Rep. John Spratt
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