

WCO OutreachCEm Resource

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Subject: Comments from Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club
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Enclosed are comments from the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Submitted by Wallace L. Taylor

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Subject: Comments from Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club
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IOWA CHAPTER

February 13, 2012

Christine Pineda, Project Manager
Mailstop EBB-282
Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Via e-mail: WCOutreach@nrc.gov

Dear Ms. Pineda:

The Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club hereby submits the following comments to the Commission's Draft Report on Background and Preliminary Assumptions for an Environmental Impact Statement--Long-Term Waste Confidence Update:

The Sierra Club is a non-profit environmental advocacy organization. Its Iowa Chapter has approximately 5,000 members. The Sierra Club advocates for the transition from non-renewable energy, including nuclear, to the use of clean and renewable energy. We oppose nuclear power because of its many adverse impacts. We are especially concerned about the environmental impacts of the mining of the uranium to produce the fuel and the long-term impact of the spent fuel.

NEPA PROCESS

The NRC must follow the NEPA process just the same as any other federal agency. Section 3 of the Draft Report claims that the waste confidence decision serves as the environmental assessment (EA) under NEPA. But the decision does not seem to comply with the CEQ regulation for the contents of an EA. According to the CEQ regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 1508.9(b), an EA must contain brief discussions of the need for the proposal, of alternatives to the proposed action, of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted. The waste confidence decision does not clearly contain any of that.

The decision, claimed to be an EA, apparently resulted in a FONSI. If that is so, why is the NRC proposing to produce an EIS? Does that mean the EIS will supplant the EA/FONSI? These questions need to be answered before proceeding with the formal NEPA process.

ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED

1. Stop the Production of Nuclear Waste

The Draft Report identifies 4 scenarios that will guide the preparation of the EIS. The scenarios appear to be the alternatives required to be evaluated by NEPA. We believe there should be another scenario/alternative evaluated. That is the scenario that no new nuclear plants be licensed and that existing plants be decommissioned and closed as soon as possible so that the production of radioactive waste would be eliminated. That would be the alternative with the least environmental impact. And that is the point of examining alternatives, to find the alternative with the least environmental impact.

And this is not an unreasonable alternative to evaluate. A 21st Century energy policy must be defined by clean and renewable energy. Nuclear energy is not clean and it is not renewable. If it were clean, this Commission would not have to deal with the problem of radioactive nuclear waste.

Numerous studies have shown that we can generate all the energy we need from renewable sources with a comprehensive transmission and distribution grid if we will adopt policies supporting that vision. See, e.g., Archer and Jacobson, Supplying Baseload Power and Reducing Transmission Requirements by Interconnecting Wind Farms, Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology (v. 46, Nov. 2007); Jacobson and Delucchi, Providing All Global Energy with Wind, Water, and Solar Power, Part I: Technologies, Energy Resources, Quantities and Areas of Infrastructure, and Materials, Energy Policy (v. 39, p. 1154-1169); Jacobson and Delucchi, Providing All Global Energy with Wind, Water, and Solar Power, Part II: Reliability, System and Transmission Costs, and Policies, Energy Policy (v. 39, p. 1170-1190. See also, The Energy Report:100% Renewable Energy by 2050, prepared for the World Wildlife Fund by Ecofys and found at www.worldwildlife.org/climate/energy-report.html.

The electric utilities and energy companies assert that in order to provide baseload power they have to use coal, natural gas or nuclear energy. But baseload as viewed by the utilities and power companies is an outdated concept. They are stuck with the narrow view of electric power coming from power plants. But rather than referring to the term baseload we are really talking about energy and capacity. Energy is the total amount of electricity that is being supplied to consumers. Capacity is the highest level of electricity that can be supplied at any one time to meet peak demand.

Renewable energy can meet the energy and capacity demands of the country, combined with a program of energy efficiency and conservation and expansion of the transmission grid. Most states, including Iowa, have energy efficiency programs subject to public utility regulation. The EIS should assume a national energy efficiency program. Likewise, many states have renewable electricity standards requiring that a certain amount of the energy consumed in the state be from renewable sources. The EIS should assume a national renewable electricity standard. There are other policies, including feed-in tariffs, tax credits, loan programs, etc., that should be adopted to encourage the expansion of renewable energy. The EIS should assume that such policies are adopted. The EIS should consider and evaluate a renewable energy future and eliminating the production of more radioactive nuclear waste.

The other important policy needed to support renewable energy is expansion of the transmission grid. We have heard the comment that since adequate transmission is not available right now we need to continue to expand the use of nuclear energy. That comment is incorrect for two reasons. First, expanded transmission is occurring right now. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has over the past few years adopted policies to promote expansion of transmission lines. The most recent FERC action is Order 1000 adopted on July 21, 2011. And every area of the country has a regional transmission organization (RTO) that promotes and coordinates expanded transmission in each respective region. In the Midwest, for example, the Midwest RTO (MISO) had approved a number of transmission expansion projects designed to accommodate increased renewable energy production and they are ready for regulatory approval. Second, it takes at least 10 years for a new nuclear plant to be licensed and put on line. New

transmission will begin to be constructed within the next year or two, long before we would gain any alleged benefit from additional nuclear power. Furthermore, a new nuclear plant, which would not be needed when renewable energy becomes dominant, would be licensed for probably 40 years and undoubtedly relicensed for another 20 years. We would be stuck with 60 more years of radioactive waste that could be avoided with the right policies supporting renewable energy.

All of these measures are part of a 21st Century energy policy that must be the replacement for coal, gas and nuclear power. The best part of renewable energy is that the wind will always blow and the sun will always shine and neither creates radioactive waste that lasts for millions of years.

2. Hardened On-Site Storage

Another scenario/alternative that should be evaluated in the EIS is hardened, on-site storage (HOSS). Waste would be moved from fuel pools at the plant site to HOSS facilities at the plant site. Transporting waste to interim away-from-reactor storage should not be done unless the reactor site is unsuitable for a HOSS facility and the move increases the safety and security of the waste. HOSS facilities must not be regarded as a permanent waste solution, and thus should not be constructed deep underground. The waste must be retrievable, and real-time radiation and heat monitoring at the HOSS facility must be implemented for early detection of radiation releases and overheating.

In other words, if the waste must be stored on-site, it must be done safely.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these preliminary comments. We look forward to the scoping meetings to begin the formal NEPA process.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Wallace L. Taylor", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Wallace L. Taylor