

Pilgrim: Learning From Jim Lonborg's Mistake

Entergy has decided to extend operation of the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station for an additional three years. This, despite the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) rating Pilgrim as one of the top two *least* safe and reliable nuclear power facilities in the nation. That means, of the ninety-nine active nuclear plants in the U.S., Pilgrim is most or second most likely to incur a potentially catastrophic malfunction. Entergy apparently believes that continued operating of Pilgrim through May 31, 2019 is a risk worth taking. However, the stakes are our lives, the possible devastation of Cape Cod, and our environment.

As a Cape resident and a psychotherapist, I attended the April 13 NRC Annual Review meeting in Plymouth with a specific concern about how the pending closure is affecting the employees' morale, and what supplementary support and oversight Entergy is providing to its employees whose focus and attention remains critical during this sensitive, interim period.

But first, a note about Jim Lonborg. In the Impossible Dream season of 1967, Red Sox pitcher Lonborg won the Cy Young award as the best pitcher in the American League. However, in the winter off-season, Lonborg, an avid skier, decided (poorly) to squeeze in one more run as twilight was approaching. We Red Sox fans know the outcome. Lonborg had a bad fall, severely damaged a knee, and essentially ended his baseball career with that casual, short-sighted decision.

Entergy, in deciding to squeeze in a few more years of operating the Pilgrim plant before closure, is making the same, short-sighted mistake. Why? For what? Who knows. Something about money to be sure. But at the risk to whom? That would be us, who live on and love Cape Cod, from which there would be no escape in the event of a Chernobyl-like event. State Senator Dan Wolf called Entergy's decision to continue operating until May 31, 2019 "an insult to our region". I consider it far worse. Entergy is essentially playing Russian Roulette with our lives, and our environment. This is far worse than a bad, short-sighted decision, it's unconscionable.

The mechanical and engineering aspects of Pilgrim are far beyond my understanding. But we all know nuclear reactors are highly technical, complex productions. The fragility and unreliability of this particular system, the same model as at Chernobyl, is well documented. My particular focus, however, is the human and personnel factor. As evidenced at the April 13 review meeting where many Pilgrim employees gave statements, there are many highly professional, dedicated and competent employees among the nearly 609-person workforce. Yet how would any of us feel knowing we were losing our jobs? How would we cope with and manage the related stress, and how might that impact our focus and attention to detail over the next three years?

It's commonly understood in the psychology field that 80% or more of our thoughts and feelings are sub-conscious, i.e. repressed and hidden even from ourselves. Learning again from Lonborg, although he was a professional and well-conditioned athlete, his mistake was going back out at dusk, when he couldn't see the moguls as clearly. The human psyche is like those moguls. We don't see, or don't know what we don't know. We have blind-spots, and can say or do things we don't understand. So the human element in the continued operation of Pilgrim, not just the physical and mechanical plant, entail unknown risks. Yet, Entergy considers all these risks negligible and worth taking. They blithely, and I think naively, report that all is safe and well, and their monitoring systems for both plant and personnel

are as if fail-proof. In reality, their business-based decision to continue full operation until May 31, 2019 closure is putting our lives at further, even heightened risk.

Our lives, and our environment appear inconsequential in Entergy's corporate strategizing and decision-making process. Entergy's rationale for continued operation during these twilight years before closure is irrelevant, and ludicrous under the circumstances. This was a bad decision that needs to be reversed. Pilgrim needs to be closed immediately.

Paul Berry



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "PBerry".