

Three Mile Island Alert

The Newsletter of Three Mile Island Alert

February 1997

Pros and Cons Aired at Waste Site Meeting

from a December 7, 1996, Derrick (Oil City, PA) article

Sandwiched by presentations from two local protest groups, a representative from ChemNuclear Systems spoke in Franklin recently about the contractor's effort to find a site in Pennsylvania for a low-level nuclear waste storage facility.

Walt Newcomb spoke briefly to the board of the Northwest Regional Planning and Development Commission, comprised of a large group of elected officials from the eight counties the commission represents.

As he spoke, protesters in the audience at the Franklin Club stared stonily and waived signs proclaiming the counties in the area were "Posted. No radioactive dumping," or declaring that "Low-level waste = high-level risk" and "Hosts make ghosts."

Following the speeches, some officials from Venango, Clarion and Forest counties said they were glad to hear more about the issue, but that they were not swayed by Newcomb's speech and would not want a nuclear-waste facility in their area.

Newcomb explained the components of the site selection process, which since July 1995 has

included a provision requiring that a municipality volunteer before its land could be used as a site for the facility.

"We want to ensure that there is broad-based support in a host municipality before we go there ... because, after all, we are going to live in that municipality," he said.

The municipality which houses the site would receive numerous benefits, Newcomb said, including 70 new jobs, direct annual payments and a host of other potential benefits which would be negotiated case-by-case.

Above all, he said, ChemNuclear is dedicated to making the storage site safe. "Safety is our number one priority. It is the most important reason for everything we do with this project," he said. Newcomb said ChemNuclear is selecting the site carefully to prevent contact between the waste and sources of water, and that the waste would be stored above ground level and sealed by three layers of concrete. In addition, he said the site would be equipped with an advanced detection system to immediately alert workers to any leakage.

TMI Plaintiffs Rebuffed by Supreme Court

from a January 20, 1997, Pennsylvania Law Weekly article

The United States Supreme Court rejected an appeal last week by 42 people who filed lawsuits over the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in Pennsylvania 18 years ago. Without comment, the court let stand rulings that said a change in federal law meant their lawsuits were filed too late.

The TMI nuclear power facility near Harrisburg released radiation into the atmosphere on March 28, 1979. As a result, more than 2,000 people sued. The appeal acted on last week was on behalf of 42 people who missed Pennsylvania's two-year deadline for suing and filed their lawsuits in Mississippi, which has a six-year deadline.

But Congress in 1988 amended the Price-Anderson Act, a federal law dealing with liability risks associated with nuclear energy, to apply Pennsylvania's two-year statute of limitations to all TMI lawsuits. The 1988 amendments retroactively nullified the lawsuits filed in Mississippi, and the justices were urged to rule that such an effect violated due-process rights. The Philadelphia-based 3rd Circuit had rejected that argument last July.

(Continued on page 3, column 1)

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Three Mile Island Alert

Three Mile Island Alert (TMIA) is a non-profit citizens' organization dedicated to the promotion of safe-energy alternatives to nuclear power, especially the Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

Formed in 1977 after the construction and licensing of TMI Unit-1 and the construction of the infamous Unit-2, TMIA is the largest and oldest safe-energy group in central Pennsylvania.

TMIA members interested in specific aspects of nuclear power are encouraged to join one of TMIA's committees. These committees include:

- Radiation Monitoring
- Low-level Radioactive Waste
- Health Effects of TMI
- Nuclear Plant Security

TMIA Planning Council

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NRC Staff Identifies Troubled Plants

from a January 29, 1997, NRC Press Release

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff advised the Commission today that it has identified 14 nuclear power plants that warrant increased NRC regulatory attention. The plants were placed on the NRC watch list earlier this month at a meeting during which senior NRC managers conducted their semi-annual review of the performance of operating nuclear power plants and fuel cycle facilities.

The plants are:

Crystal River Unit 3, operated by Florida Power Corp. near Crystal River, Florida (listed for the first time);

Dresden Units 2 and 3, operated by Commonwealth Edison Co. near Morris, Illinois (first listed in June 1987, removed in December 1988, and added again in January 1992);

Indian Point 3, operated by the New York Power Authority near Buchanan, New York (listed in June 1993);

LaSalle Units 1 and 2, operated by Commonwealth Edison near Ottawa, Illinois (listed for the first time);

Maine Yankee, operated by Maine Yankee Atomic Power Co., near Bath, Maine (listed for the first time);

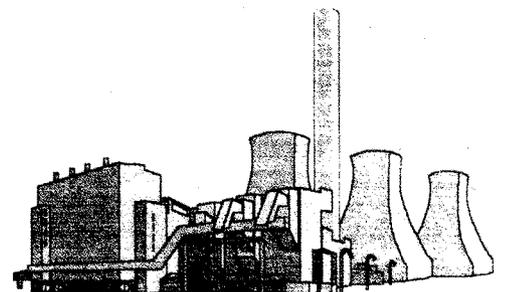
Millstone Units 1, 2 and 3, operated by Northeast Utilities Service Co. at Waterford, Connecticut (first listed last January);

Salem Units 1 and 2, operated by Public Service Electric and Gas Co. near Salem, New Jersey (listed for the first time); and

Zion Units 1 and 2, operated by Commonwealth Edison 40 miles north of Chicago (first listed in January 1991 and removed in January 1993).

The staff also informed the Commission that it has identified a trend of declining performance at Illinois Power Company's Clinton plant near Clinton, Illinois, and at Wisconsin Electric Power Company's Point Beach facility near Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

[Editor's note: Texts of letters to utilities with plants on the watch list or with a declining trend are available on the NRC's Internet home page at this address: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>. The transcript of the Commission briefing is also posted.]



(Continued from "Pros and Cons

Also speaking were Jan Beichner and Scott Wohlstein on behalf of Stop The Organizations Raping Mankind (STORM) and Susan Hahnfeldt from Protect the Environment And Children Everywhere (PEACE).

Judith Johnsrud, originally scheduled to speak for STORM, was unable to attend the meeting. Speaking first, Beichner emphasized the possible health risks associated with nuclear-waste storage and said local municipalities should not be swayed by benefits offered by the state. "Before anyone gets excited about the bribes, they must look at the risks," she said. "Is a low-level waste dump dangerous for you and your community? Only you can decide by educating yourself about the issues and the facts," she said.

At Beichner's request, Scott Wohlstein of Mobilwave Co. spoke to highlight the economic risks of hosting the facility. "The bottom line is, you can't expect businesses to stay in this community...if you don't keep your house clean," he said.

Following Newcomb's speech, Hahnfeldt criticized ChemNuclear directly, accusing the company of misleading the public. "There is no safe dose of radiation. ...Though classified as low-level, waste targeted for this dump is high-risk. Low-level waste is a misnomer," she said. "After six years, [they are] still trying to sell...this nasty piece of work under the guise of low-level. It's low, all right."

During a question-and-answer period following the speeches, as many protesters rose to give speeches of their own, Clarion County Commissioner Keith Martin stood to declare his opposition to the waste site. "Clarion County is not interested in what you have to sell," he said, to loud clapping and yells from the protesters. Martin's colleague, Commissioner Sally Minich, said later she heard a lot of good points made during the presentations, but she would not comment on what she thought of locating the waste site in this area. "It's a problem that needs addressing, and I don't have the answer," she said.

Venango County Commissioner Bob Murray said he was glad for the opportunity to hear both sides of the issue, but that the commissioners do not want the storage facility in Venango County. "Our main concern is from the economic point of view," he said. "This county needs to be focusing on job creation and economic development. I'm concerned that if this site locates here, it will be the last business to locate here."

Forest County Commissioner Samuel Wagner said he doesn't see his county ever wanting to volunteer to host the site. "We're obviously following the whole process as close as we can to determine if that will be a possibility," he said. "This is something we need to learn more about, not just public officials but the public as a whole. This is an issue that's not going to go away."

NRC Receives Application from DOE for License to Store TMI Fuel Debris

from a January 14, 1997, NRC press release

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has received an application from the Department of Energy (DOE) for a license to store core debris from the Three Mile Island-2 reactor in dry storage casks at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL) complex in Butte County, Idaho.

DOE shipped the debris from the damaged reactor core to INEL between 1986 and 1990 and stored it in a spent fuel pool in the Test Area North facility of the complex. The dry cask storage installation DOE plans to construct and operate will be about 25 miles away--but still within the INEL complex--in the Idaho Chemical Processing Plant.

Before deciding whether to issue a license, the NRC staff will prepare an environmental impact statement and will conduct a technical evaluation of the application to determine whether it meets NRC requirements. The term of the license, if granted, would be 20 years.

No Place for Nuclear Leftovers

from January 31, 1997, The Morning Call (Allentown) and The Washington Post articles

Faced with a mountain of nuclear waste and a shortage of places to put it, a coalition of governments and utilities from 36 states asked a judge yesterday to hold the Clinton administration to a 1998 deadline for opening a dump site for spent commercial nuclear fuel. The coalition, which includes 46 state agencies and 33 power companies, filed papers in the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals demanding that the Department of Energy honor a 1982 commitment to take control of stockpiles of highly radioactive wastes that are piling up at power plants around the country.

Local utilities Pennsylvania Power & Light Co., PECO Energy Co. and GPU Nuclear Co. joined with Pennsylvania and New Jersey in suing the federal government. The action was taken six weeks after Energy Department officials acknowledged in a letter to electric utilities that it cannot meet a Jan. 31, 1998, deadline for accepting spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear plants.

The petition also seeks to free utility companies from paying additional money into a fund for the construction of a still-unbuilt storage site. More than \$ 12 billion has gone into the fund in the past 15 years.

They want a federal appeals court in the District of Columbia to:

*Order the Department of Energy to accept depleted nuclear fuel starting Jan. 31, 1998, a date established in a 1982 law.

*Allow electric utility companies with nuclear plants to stop paying fees into a federal fund for cleanup costs and instead to put the money in escrow until a burial site is opened.

Utilities have paid \$ 7.4 billion into the fund and owe another \$ 2 billion, the lawsuit says. Investment interest puts the balance at \$ 12 billion.

In Pennsylvania, home to five nuclear power plants, utilities have paid \$ 500 million, the lawsuit says. PP&L customers alone have contributed \$ 15 million a year since 1983, the company says. Like many utilities, PP&L that year signed a government contract for disposal of spent fuel from its plant along the Susquehanna River in Luzerne County, starting next year. The radioactive material is left upon depletion of the uranium pellets that fuel reactors. Roughly 30,000 tons already is stored in underwater holding tanks at plants across America.

Authorities envision a national repository 100 miles from Las Vegas, underneath Nevada's Yucca Mountain. But concern over material that remains lethal for

centuries, opposition from Nevada and other delays prompted the government last month to admit that no site will be open before 2010. The delays are forcing utilities to create additional storage space at many plants, a process that the industry says is expensive and forces its customers to pay twice for fuel storage.

PP&L now stores spent fuel rods in water alongside each reactor at Susquehanna. If necessary, there's enough room for five more years' worth of used fuel, said Herbert D. Woodeshick, a top executive there. But PP&L had hoped to begin storing the material in special canisters outside the plant this fall, Woodeshick said.

Contractor-related concerns have delayed that plan until next year.

Operators of the three other nuclear plants in eastern Pennsylvania yesterday reported no immediate need for extra on-site storage capacity. But two are considering it. One nuclear power plant operates near the Lehigh Valley: Limerick, run by Philadelphia-based PECO, in upper Montgomery County. Its storage capacity will last until 2009, spokesman Bill Jones said. PECO has four years' capacity at a separate facility near the Maryland line near Peach Bottom, York County. Jones said alternative storage is being considered there. Capacity at Three Mile Island, near Harrisburg and operated by a sister company of GPU Energy Co., Reading, extends beyond 2014, spokeswoman Laura Karinch said.

Radioactive Rail Cargo Exposed

from a January 28, 1997, The Morning Call (Allentown) article

A carload of slightly radioactive parts from a nuclear power plant was accidentally exposed at the Conrail rail yard in Allentown on January 26, and hazardous waste specialists were sent in, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission said yesterday. NRC spokeswoman Dianne Screnci said the door of a rail-car container holding about 40,000 pounds of steam turbine diaphragms was found slightly open while workers prepared to send the plastic-wrapped parts to a decontamination site in Koppel, Beaver County, northwest of Pittsburgh.

“Some of the bracing on the car collapsed and the (rail-car container door) cracked open,” she said. “They’re still trying to get it closed. That’s all we know right now.” The cargo was from the Monticello nuclear plant near Minneapolis, Minn. The rail car had mistakenly been sent to Dockside, N.J., then re-routed through Allentown. The level of contamination in the parts posed “no significant risk,” Screnci said. The parts themselves apparently knocked the car door open during transit.

Screnci said hazardous waste specialists from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, the state Department of Environmental Protection and Conrail were still investigating the mishap at press time.

NRC begins plant design inspections

from a December 2, 1996, Energy Report article

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) began the first in a series of special design inspections to ensure license compliance after recent findings that some plants were operating contrary to their license.

A six-member team began the first of the series at the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant in Florida. The second will begin shortly at Three Mile Island Unit 1 in Pennsylvania, and the third at Washington Nuclear Project-2 in the State of Washington. Similar inspections will be performed periodically over the next two years at other plants.

[Editor’s note: The inspection of TMI Unit 1 found that an emergency pump system designed to get coolant to the reactor core in case of emergency was only pumping air when used under some circumstances.]

NRC said the inspections will focus on reviews of the plants’ original design and configuration, and conformance with the licensees’ safety analysis report. Each inspection team will be made up of engineers from NRC and design specialists from either Stone & Webster or Sargent & Lundy, architect and engineering firms with which NRC has contracted.

Last month, the NRC ordered all power plant operators to submit comprehensive information within three months on their efforts to maintain accurate designs after commission inspectors found design documents at many plants do not show what actually exists.

State Sues U.S. To Get Ward Valley Site

from a February 1, 1997, Associated Press article

Saying that his patience was spent, Gov. Pete Wilson said Friday that California is suing the federal government in an effort to obtain 1,000 acres of the Mojave Desert for a low-level nuclear waste dump, known as Ward Valley.

California has already licensed Idaho-based U.S. Ecology to build the dump 18 miles from the Colorado River near Needles. But safety concerns, and the fact that another of the company’s dumps in Nevada is already leaking, prompted U.S. Interior Department officials last year to order additional soil and water testing at Ward Valley.

Dan Hirsch of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, which opposes the dump, accused the Wilson administration of suing to try to block environmental testing. “It sends a very loud signal that the governor knows the nuclear project is unsafe and will leak like all of this company’s other dumps,” Hirsch said. “It is cowardly and shameful,” he said. “I think this is the last gasp of the Ward Valley project.”

The state’s lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, asks the court to compel the Interior Department to turn over the land. A move in January 1993 by President George Bush’s administration to transfer the land to the state was blocked by a federal judge in San Francisco.

Thermo-Lag Laggards Put on Notice

from a November 11, 1996, Inside NRC article

NRC intends to tell the licensees for 22 units they need to expedite their plans for resolving inoperable Thermo-Lag fire barriers.

According to a report to commissioners, staff plans to urge licensees to bring their inoperable fire barriers into compliance by the end of 1997 -- which would be nearly six years after the barriers were declared inoperable by the agency.

Licensees whose schedules extend beyond 1997 will be called in and asked to explain the necessity for the longer schedules. If NRC is not satisfied, it may take enforcement action or even issue orders directing the licensees to comply by the end of next year, according to the agency's October 31 semi-annual status report.

NRC has already met with the Tennessee Valley Authority about Sequoyah-1 and -2, who set its schedule for Thermo-Lag compliance at January 2000 or nine years after the problem was first brought to light. (It was a 1975 fire at another TVA plant, Browns Ferry, which led to the NRC fire protection regulations with which Thermo-Lag is in conflict. As a historical footnote, Browns Ferry was also among the last of the plants to "comply" with those regulations after their initial adoption in 1980.)

Licensees for the following plants have schedules for Thermo-Lag resolution extending beyond 1997 and are therefore candidates for the so-called "management meetings," staff says: Turkey Point-3 and -4; Perry; Davis-Besse; Susquehanna-1 and -2; Crystal River-3; Millstone-1 and -2; Three Mile Island-1; Peach Bottom-2 and -3; Limerick-1 and -2; Oyster Creek; Hatch-1 and -2; St. Lucie-1 and -2; Vogtle-1 and -2; River Bend; Summer, and Clinton.

There have been 14 exemption requests filed in connection with returning Thermo-Lag to compliance, according to the report. One, from Virginia Power Co.'s North Anna-1 and -2 was approved. One, from GPU Nuclear's Three Mile Island-1, was denied. Two, from Florida Power & Light Co.'s Turkey Point-3 and -4 and Maine Yankee Atomic Power Co.'s Maine Yankee, were withdrawn. The remainder are either "on hold," which appears to mean under consideration for withdrawal or resubmittal, or under active review, staff said.

The denied TMI-1 submittal was for a fire barrier with an endurance rating of less than one hour. North Anna's exemption, which was approved, involved the cover plates on openings through charging pump cubicle walls not being fire rated.

TMIA Security Committee Update

TMIA Security Committee chairman Scott Portzline was interviewed for a recent PBS program on nuclear terrorism. "America's Defense Monitor," produced by the Center for Defense Information, is not shown on the local affiliate, but a copy of the show is available from TMIA. He discusses the 1993 intrusion at TMI and the World Trade Center terrorists' training camp only 30 miles from TMI. The terrorists threatened to attack nuclear targets and performed a night-time mock assault on an electrical substation near the training camp.

Scott was also the guest on a national radio talk show. The Art Bell show can be heard on the internet at <http://www.artbell.com> using "Real Audio" software. Select the January 28, 1997, program under "Archived Shows."

Scott attended a November NRC briefing on lost and stolen nuclear materials. There are about 9,000 licensed devices that are missing. Steel mills have inadvertently smelted nuclear devices. Decontaminating a steel can cost as much as \$100,000,000. The cost of disposing of a licensed device can cost as much as \$20,000. The fine for illegal disposal is only \$2,000.

TMIA Security Committee website is located at: <http://pages.prodigy.com/nuclear.terrorism>.

Pennsylvania Launches Deregulation of Utilities

from a December 27, 1996, Central Penn Business Journal article

In December 1996, Pennsylvania became the fourth state to deregulate its electric companies, which means any company can sell electricity in the state using the existing network of wire. But what's being deregulated is the generation portion of consumer bills, the cost of generating power. The transmission and distribution costs, heavy lines from the power plant and the power lines leading into homes, will remain regulated.

Open competition, also called retail wheeling, was pushed in the state Legislature through separate bills sponsored by Rep. Frank Tulli, R-Dauphin, and Sen. David Brightbill, R-Lebanon. By the year 2001, all 5.2 million Pennsylvania customers will have the choice of picking which company supplies their electricity. By early 1998, the state Public Utility Commission should know how much utilities can charge customers for so-called "stranded cost" -- expensive long-term investments such as nuclear power plants. That's where the battle will begin, according to state Consumer Advocate Irvin Popowski.

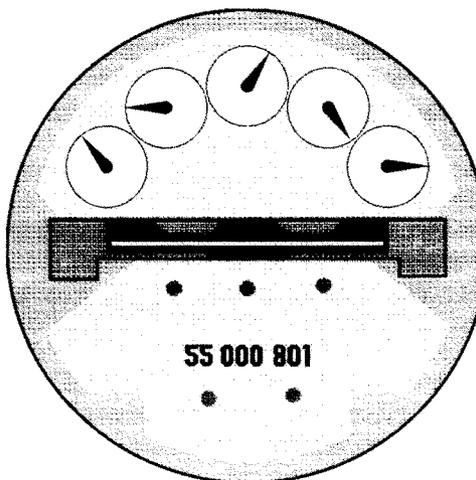
Meanwhile, electric companies have already restructured their wholesale business, separating electric generation from transmission and delivery. These efforts response to competition in the wholesale electric market created by the 1992 National Energy Policies Act. One factor that drove the

deregulation debate is the disparity in electric costs. Pennsylvania rates are in the highest 25 percent of electricity rates among other states, according to the Energy Information Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy.

PUC Commissioner John Hanger, a Democrat who supported open competition, suggested that competition could result in a 16.61 percent rate cut for PP&L residential customers and an 8.32 percent rate change for Med-Ed customers.

"Competition should be free and open, providing small business equal and direct access to all available generators of electricity," said Tim Lyden, Pennsylvania director of the National Federation of Independent Business.

The biggest question is: Will consumers see reductions in their monthly bills as a result of the new law?



Pennsylvania DEP Urges Homeowners to Test for Radon

from a December 31, 1996, PR Newswire article

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has a New Year's resolution that is easy to keep, relatively inexpensive to do, and will benefit the entire family -- test your home for radon.

"[Winter is the best time] to test your home for radon since levels of the radioactive gas tend to be at their highest," DEP Deputy Secretary James W. Rue said. "The levels peak during this time since homes are closed tightly."

DEP urges all homeowners to test for radon and fix it if the level is four picoCuries per liter or higher. Testing is the only way for persons to know for sure if they are at risk from radon.

Do-it-yourself radon test kits are available at many hardware or home improvement stores for less than \$20. Companies can also be contracted to test homes. More information on radon, including a list of certified radon businesses, is available by calling DEP's Radon Hot Line at 1-800-23RADON (1-800-237-2366) or visiting DEP's web site at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose information by environmental subject/radiation protection/radon).

Connecticut Yankee Owners Vote to Retire Nuclear Plant

from a December 9, 1996, Inside NRC article

The joint owners of the Connecticut Yankee nuclear plant at Haddam Neck voted December 4 to permanently close the unit after nearly 29 years of service. Built at a cost of \$ 94.6-million, Connecticut Yankee started commercial operation in 1968. Last week, the joint owners voted to begin the anticipated \$ 400-million decommissioning process.

The public announcement December 4 was not unexpected and came a scant 15-minutes after the vote. An economic analysis on the 616-MW Westinghouse PWR showed its owners could save \$ 100-million by shutting Connecticut Yankee and buying replacement power instead. Connecticut Yankee, with 11 more years on its operating license, now joins a growing list of nuclear units suffering premature deaths, including Portland General Electric Co.'s Trojan; Yankee Atomic Electric Co.'s Rowe; Southern California Edison's San Onofre-1; Public Service Company of Colorado's Fort St. Vrain; the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's Rancho Seco, and GPU Nuclear Corp.'s Three Mile Island-2.

Northeast Utilities (NU), whose wholly owned subsidiary Connecticut Light & Power Co. operates the Connecticut Yankee plant, initially shut the unit in July of 1996 after discovering a problem with the operability of the

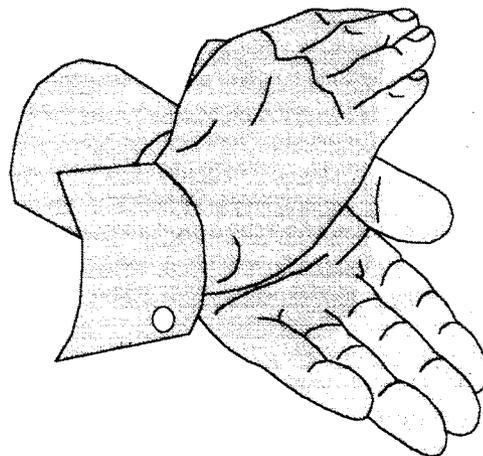
containment air fans at the unit under certain conditions. That problem was since discovered to be generic to the industry and became the subject of an NRC generic letter, 96-06. When it shut down, Connecticut Yankee joined NU's three-unit Millstone station in extended outages. Millstone's troubles began in late 1995 as one-by-one the units were shut down and ordered not to restart without NRC permission. All three Millstone units are on the NRC's problem plant list. [See p.2 for List].

Extensive operational, procedural, and material problems at Millstone were said not to exist at Connecticut Yankee, but after the July shutdown and subsequent operational mishaps this summer, NRC became more suspicious of that assertion and required NU not to restart Connecticut Yankee until it could demonstrate that that was indeed the case. The unit had already become subject to extensive NRC scrutiny and was in line for more, as well as potentially expensive repairs and responses when late in the summer co-owner New England Electric System called for the economic analysis that ultimately spelled its doom.

"The low cost of replacement power, combined with the relative small size and age of Connecticut Yankee, make it in our customers' best interests to permanently retire the unit," said Bruce Kenyon,

president and chief executive officer of NU nuclear. The decision to shut the unit came the same day NRC was meeting with NU officials to discuss numerous apparent violations of NRC requirements at the plant, as well as at Millstone, which could lead to substantial fines.

NU is planning an economic analysis on Millstone-1 as well, a spokesman said. Millstone-1 is the oldest of the three-unit Millstone station. It is also the unit which, because of its unauthorized refueling practices, launched NU and the industry onto the cover of Time magazine and into a regulatory period of strict enforcement of compliance with requirements from which they have yet to emerge. NU spokesman Tony Nericcio could not say when the Millstone-1 analysis was due but said NU officials are confident that its operation will remain, as now, economically viable.



Ukraine Closes One Reactor, But Reopens Another

from a December 1, 1996, Associated Press article

Ukraine shut down a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl yesterday, but immediately announced plans to restart another at the disaster-ridden plant.

The announcement clouded prospects for the final closure of Chernobyl, the site of the world's worst nuclear accident ten years ago. Chernobyl's only other working reactor, No. 3, is scheduled to be shut down in 1999.

The country's Nuclear Energy Committee, citing Ukraine's energy crisis, said reactor No. 2 would be temporarily restarted at the end of 1997. The reactor has been idle since a massive fire in 1992, and President Leonid Kuchma has repeatedly said it would not be restarted. A committee spokesman would not say how long the reactor would be restarted.

Engineers shut down Chernobyl's 19-year-old reactor No. 1 yesterday, slowly cutting power until the 1,000 watt RBMK reactor stopped at 10:40 p.m., Ivan Sharshin, duty engineer at the plant, said.

Board Ponders Raising \$94 Million for N-Dump

from a January 31, 1997, The News and Observer (Raleigh, NC) article

A regional commission heard plenty of suggestions but little consensus Thursday on how it should finance a low-level radioactive waste disposal project that is slowly running out of money. So far, \$ 91 million has been spent on the project, with about \$30 million coming from North Carolina and the rest from the compact. At least \$ 114 million more is needed for licensing and construction, but the compact has only about \$ 20 million available.

Two factors account for the shortfall. First, South Carolina dropped out of the compact in 1995. That eliminated the compact's source of funding: fees charged to companies that send their waste to a radioactive waste landfill in Barnwell, S.C. In addition, a North Carolina waste authority has continued to invest money in studies of the Wake site, although regulators have warned the land may be geologically unsuitable for waste disposal. Even if the authority obtains a license, some of its top officials are unsure whether companies will use the facility. Cheaper disposal sites are now available in Utah and South Carolina.

At Thursday's meeting, acting authority director John Mac Millan said that waste generators might have to commit funds to the disposal facility if they want it to become a reality.

Congressional Energy Votes Available Online

Voters who want to hold members of Congress accountable on questions of safe and sustainable energy policy may be interested in a new feature of the Critical Mass Energy Project's web site (<http://www.essential.org/CMEP>).

A voting index (located in the Resources section of the home page) contains a record of how each member of Congress voted on a variety of energy policy questions in recent years.

The vote index is not a comprehensive list of every vote with an impact on the nation's energy policy. Rather, recorded votes were selected as indicators of where members of Congress stand on specific questions. Thus a budget reconciliation bill that contains a BTU tax as one of many provisions is not on the page, while a procedural motion that pertains strictly to the survival of a wasteful reactor program is.

For more information, contact Michael Grynberg at grynberg@citizen.org.

Activists Launch Fourth Drive to Shut Maine Yankee

from a January 23, 1997, Portland Press Herald article

With \$ 25 and a new campaign theme, Maine's determined cadre of anti-nuclear activists launched their fourth campaign to shut down Maine Yankee. William S. Linnell II said a new political action committee called Cheaper, Safer Power will begin collecting signatures to force a November 1998 referendum vote on a plan to close the Wiscasset nuclear power plant by Jan. 1, 2000. He said nuclear power is no longer the best buy for the buck.

"If successful, we will begin the new millennium with cheaper, safer power," Linnell told reporters during a press conference. He said Cheaper, Safer Power opened for business this week with \$ 25 in the bank and the intention of organizing "a real live, grass-roots citizens' effort." Linnell charged that Central Maine Power Co., which owns 38 percent of the plant, pays more for the power Maine Yankee produces when it is on line than it does for replacement power when it is off line. Maine Yankee, racked by problems for much of the past two years, has been closed since Dec. 5 for repairs and is not expected to reopen until next month.

Linnell's pitch goes to the heart of Maine Yankee's long-standing argument for staying open. During three successive referendums in the 1980s, CMP argued that closing the plant early would drive up electricity costs. Mark Ishkanian,

CMP spokesman, acknowledged Wednesday that replacement power is cheaper than nuclear power today, chiefly because of \$ 30 million worth of safety improvements the plant must make to satisfy the concerns of nuclear regulators. But he said that, over time, nuclear power remains the best buy. "It's less expensive for us to continue to operate in a safe and reliable manner than it is to shut down and buy replacement power," he said.

The Maine Nuclear Referendum Committee tried three times during the 1980s to close the nuclear power plant, launching referendums in 1980, 1982 and 1987. All three failed despite highly publicized disasters at other nuclear power plants. During each referendum, Maine Yankee and its owners argued successfully that closing the plant before its scheduled decommissioning in 2008 would cost utility customers millions more in higher electricity rates. Supporters spent millions getting that message across, including a record-breaking \$ 4.7 million in 1987 that dwarfed the MNRC's \$600,000 campaign.

Now, a decade later, Maine Yankee is in trouble again. Its owners must spend \$ 30 million this year to address safety concerns raised by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission during inspections last fall. And, in an unusual move that

acknowledged its troubles, owners hired Entergy Corp., a Louisiana company with a reputation for turning around failing nuclear power plants, to improve day-to-day operations at the Wiscasset plant.

Since the referendum won't be held until November 1998, Maine Yankee has ample time to improve that rating by getting its prices down and performance up. "It gives Maine Yankee time to rebuild the confidence of the Maine people," said Gov. Angus King. He said he would vote to keep the plant open if the referendum were held today but would be monitoring its progress. "I'll be watching as closely as anyone else."

But Linnell claimed Wednesday that public momentum for a shutdown is building. "The tide has turned," he said. While safety questions lurked beneath the surface during earlier campaigns, Linnell said they were out in the open today as a result of the NRC's investigation. And, while CMP can once again spend millions trying to defeat this referendum, it can no longer claim that nuclear power is the best buy for today's buck, Linnell said. "Maine Yankee is imploding" he said.

Maine May Join Only Three Other States In Stockpiling Potassium Iodide

from a December 8, 1996, Portland Press Herald article

A state advisory committee on radiation has recommended that Maine join Tennessee, Alabama, and Arizona in stockpiling potassium iodide near nuclear power plants as a public health measure. The final decision rests with Gov. Angus King, who has indicated he will support the panel.

Potassium iodide has become a fast-moving issue in the controversial field of nuclear power. The action thrusts Maine into the forefront of a debate that's taking place worldwide. The debate in Maine has followed a familiar pattern.

On one side are people at odds with nuclear power plants. On the other is Maine Yankee. In the middle are public officials, trying to use science and policy to resolve an issue charged with controversy and emotion. Last week, state officials decided to come down on the side of caution.

The thyroid is a small gland in the neck that secretes a hormone used by the body to regulate growth and metabolism. Scientists know that when the gland is exposed to radioactive forms of iodine - as would likely be released into the air in a major nuclear accident - the radiation will be absorbed and could lead to cancer and other illnesses. They also know the radioactive iodine can be blocked by ingesting potassium iodide, a stable form of iodine known by its chemical symbol KI.

Potassium iodide pills are stockpiled

now at fire stations, jails, nursing homes and other institutions within 10 miles of Maine Yankee. These facilities were chosen because if the plant ever had an accident in which high levels of radiation were released, some people wouldn't be able to evacuate the area right away. To head off the risk of a preventable cancer, rescue workers and confined residents such as prisoners would be able to take potassium iodide until they could leave the area. Now, however, those policies are being reconsidered.

Part of the reexamination stems from lessons learned after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion in the former Soviet Union. High levels of thyroid cancers are now being seen in children who were living near the plant and its radiation plume, particularly in Belarus.

By contrast, residents in nearby southeastern Poland, who were given potassium iodide after the accident, have reportedly not suffered a rise in thyroid cancers. That has led Belgium, Switzerland, and France to set up potassium iodide distribution programs near nuclear plants.

Three states now stockpile potassium iodide - Tennessee, Alabama and Arizona. Eddie Nanney, Tennessee's deputy director of radiological health, says his state has stockpiled KI near the Sequoyah and Watt's Bar power plants for 10 years. At the start, the pills were distributed to homes. But after the medicine's shelf life expired - in about five years - officials decided

to stockpile the drug at the county level. That has avoided the "logistical nightmare," Nanney says, of supplying people who move in and out of the area, lose the bottles or have expired medicine. "If people wish to get some," Nanney said, "they can contact the county health departments."

Maine's current policy on potassium iodide is based on two core assumptions: An accident resulting in a major radiation release at Maine Yankee is very unlikely; and residents and visitors would be evacuated long before it became necessary to distribute the thyroid-protecting drug.

Clough Toppan, the director of Maine's health engineering division, says the experience at Three Mile Island showed that containment buildings at U.S. reactors do a good job of holding back radioactive gases and releasing them slowly. "It's not too Pollyannaish," Toppan says, "to think that there would be many hours before there would be any release." Toppan also dismisses analogies to Chernobyl, because the plant there lacked American-style containment systems. But anti-nuclear groups counter that, in a massive accident involving the melting of a plant's nuclear core, a release could happen in this country.

For its part, Maine Yankee has tried to play down the issue of potassium iodide by citing current federal and state policy that favors evacuation.

Opposition To Use of Plutonium For Reactor Fuel Grows

from a December 9, 1996, Critical Mass Energy Project press release

A growing coalition of national, international, and grassroots groups today announced vigorous opposition to a plan by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) that could lead to the use of approximately 50 tons of plutonium from nuclear bombs as fuel in U.S. commercial nuclear reactors. The DOE today released a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on plutonium disposition that advocates investigating two options - use as fuel or immobilize in glass for permanent storage of excess military plutonium.

One of the options involves combining plutonium and uranium into mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel pellets for use in nuclear power reactors. The other is to vitrify (encapsulate in glass) plutonium into a waste form. The pursuit of the MOX option would undermine a 20-year United States policy to avoid the civilian use of plutonium. In addition, if a MOX fabrication plant were in operation, there would be renewed pressure for the DOE to increase the reprocessing of irradiated (spent) fuel to isolate plutonium which could then be used as MOX.

"This is a stunning reversal of the prudent foundation of U.S. nonproliferation policy designed to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists and rogue states," said Jim Adams, Senior

Analyst for the Safe Energy Communication Council. "Opposed by many scientists, experts and the public, developing the MOX option would open a dangerous Pandora's box," he concluded.

The PEIS failed to formally consider the economic and nonproliferation factors weighing against the use of MOX. These issues were discussed in other documents that were not subject to the strict standards required by the National Environmental Policy Act. "It is important that Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary weigh the cost and nonproliferation factors that were kept out of the PEIS before arriving at a final decision," noted Paul Leventhal, President of the Nuclear Control Institute. "Plutonium fuel in commercial reactors makes no sense from a cost standpoint and is downright dangerous from a proliferation standpoint. Vitrification makes sense from both perspectives and should be her first choice," concluded Mr. Leventhal.

The pursuit of the MOX option will send the wrong signal to other countries about a change in the U.S. position on nuclear fuel policy. "Using the MOX fuel option for plutonium disposition will take longer, be more expensive, and encourage world-wide use of plutonium, a key component of nuclear weapons," stated Maureen Eldredge, Program Director for the Military Production Network, a

coalition of grassroots organizations. "There is no good rationale for continuing down this dangerous path. If this is an example of how the U.S. shows strong leadership on international security issues, we are in big trouble."

"Greenpeace opposes any recommendation by the DOE to use plutonium as nuclear fuel. The decision to use MOX is a wrong-headed and risky reversal of U.S. nonproliferation policy and is being made to the satisfaction of the plutonium industry in Russia, France, Britain, and Japan," said Tom Clements, a spokesman for Greenpeace International. "We will vigorously work to oppose the use of plutonium fuel and promote its treatment as nuclear waste," he concluded. Bill Magavern, the Director of Public Citizen's Critical Mass Energy Project, declared, "Citizens groups across the country have stopped previous attempts to use plutonium as a reactor fuel and we will fight this proposal as long as a better alternative exists - and immobilization is a better alternative."

Furthermore, the U.S. is worried about the intention of Russian leaders who are leaning towards the development of a MOX industry to deal with surplus plutonium from the dismantlement of nuclear weapons. "The most important result of a decision to pursue a MOX option will be to encourage

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Gallium Residue Complicates Plutonium Conversion

from a January 27, 1997, New York Times News Service article

Nuclear weapon scientists say that plutonium the Energy Department wants to take out of surplus bombs and turn into fuel in civilian reactors contains an element that will not only interfere with the conversion but will also cause chemical problems after the fuel is used.

The element, gallium, can be removed from the plutonium through a chemical process the Energy Department uses, but this generates large quantities of wastewater contaminated with radioactive materials. A cleaner removal process has been tested successfully on a small scale, but it will take more work to develop the process so that it can be used on the tons of material that would be needed, experts say. Such a process could take years to develop and test, they say, and even with the cleaner system, engineers would still have to decide how much residual gallium would be tolerable in reactor fuel. Two scientists at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, in a paper to be published this week by a nongovernmental environmental group, say that the gallium will have to be removed if the Energy Department wants to convert the plutonium in reactors. Another option, the department says, is to mix the plutonium with highly radioactive waste and embed both in steel canisters filled with glass. The scientists' paper will appear in *Science for Democratic Action*, which is the newsletter of the

Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, a nongovernmental, Washington-based group concerned with nuclear weapons production.

It is not clear how pressing a problem the gallium issue is because disposing of plutonium in reactors is not expected to begin for several years. Opponents of converting plutonium are mainly worried about the spread of nuclear weapons, but have raised the issue of gallium, noting that it adds yet more cost and uncertainty to the concept.

In October, when the Energy Department announced a "dual track" strategy of preparing for plutonium use in reactors and for disposal by mixing it with radioactive waste, the department said that "gallium removal operations are believed to be unnecessary."

But in a table estimating costs, the department listed "adverse variations" that included removing gallium, and said this might add \$200 million to the \$1 billion cost to turn the plutonium into fuel and to prepare reactors to use it. In a reactor, the plutonium would be combined with uranium in a form called mixed oxide, and abbreviated as MOx.

According to one of the Los Alamos scientists, Dr. Carl A. Beard, project director for nuclear fuels research and development,

there is no estimated cost of developing the cleaner process.

The fact of the gallium in plutonium was declassified about a year ago. Gallium does not play a role in nuclear fission, but it makes the plutonium easier to manufacture into bombs and keeps stable over a wider temperature range, according to government officials. Converting the metal plutonium in weapons into the ceramic form used in reactor fuel requires baking it at high temperatures, and that turns the gallium into a gas. The gas will turn back into a metal on the furnace walls, which will cause problems, according to Beard. In addition, gallium chemically attacks zirconium, the metal that is used to make fuel rods. "Suppose you have 1 part per million in MOx, and over a 100-year period, it turns out to be bad for confinement," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, the president of the Institute that is publishing the paper. "What are you going to do?"

Beard said in a telephone interview that a concentration of 40 or 50 parts per million would probably be acceptable. "I'm confident, but my confidence doesn't necessarily provide full justification for a limit," he said, adding that more scientific work was needed. In a separate article in the newsletter, Makhijani argued that using plutonium in civilian reactors would require modifications and new licenses for the reactors, and would make the spent fuel more difficult to handle.

Environmentalists Deliver 40,000 "Don't Waste America" Signatures to President and Senate Majority Leader

from a February 11, 1997, NIRS press release

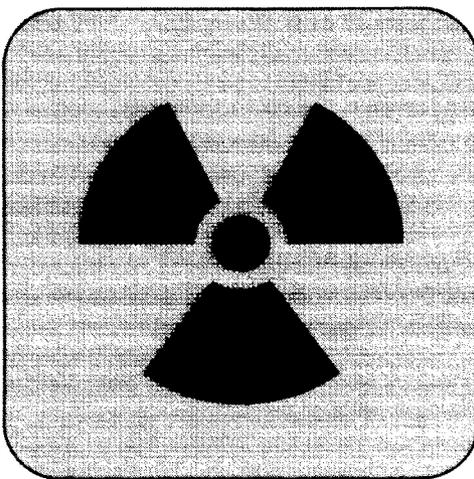
On February 11th, environmentalists delivered "Don't Waste America" petitions containing 40,000+ signatures to President Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, one day before the Senate Energy Committee was originally scheduled to vote on S. 104--better known as the "Mobile Chernobyl Act." The Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) also gave Clinton and Lott a list of 126 environmental and citizens organizations on record against S. 104 and the identical bill from last Congress, S. 1936.

[Editor's note: At press time, the Critical Mass Energy Project reported that the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee vote on S. 104 had been delayed until Feb. 26.]

Although S. 104's lead sponsors are Sens. Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Craig (R-Idaho), informed sources indicate that the bill is a priority for Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who has decided to make it a centerpiece of G.O.P. environmental legislation this year. President Clinton's intention to veto the bill was reaffirmed by Department of Energy Deputy Secretary Thomas Grumbly in a Senate Energy Committee hearing last week. Last year, S. 1936 passed the Senate 63-37--a margin sufficient to sustain a presidential veto. The House did not vote on a similar measure (HR 1020), and comparable House

legislation has not been introduced this year.

"S. 104 panders to the worst environmental instincts," said NIRS Executive Director Michael Mariotte, "it reflects only outright NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard). But the American people are smarter than that. They want real solutions to environmental problems, not quick fixes that make



problems worse. Nor do they want yet another financial bail-out for the irresponsible nuclear power industry, which this legislation shows to be the biggest NIMBY of all."

"The nuclear industry has implied in numerous advertisements that centralized 'interim' storage means that radioactive waste would only be located in one remote region of Nevada," said Mariotte. "In fact, nuclear waste would continue to be stored at every operating reactor,

meaning that the number of existing nuclear waste sites would increase by one and decrease by zero." S. 104 would establish an "interim" high-level nuclear waste dump near Yucca Mountain, Nevada, which is being studied as a possible permanent storage facility. Current law explicitly prohibits placement of an "interim" dump in Nevada precisely to avoid prejudicing the site characterization process.

Under S. 104, transportation of high-level nuclear waste would occur over highways and railways in 43 states and the District of Columbia, leading to fears of a catastrophic "Mobile Chernobyl" in the event of a serious transportation accident. Upwards of 80,000 waste shipments could be made over the next 30 years under the bill, depending on the size casks used and transport methods chosen. To date, some 2400 shipments of high-level waste have been made in the U.S., mostly small amounts of fuel from nuclear submarines. Seven accidents have occurred--a rate of one accident every 343 shipments, which would predict some 268 accidents in years to come.

"While no high-level waste transport accident has yet resulted in radiation release," said Mary Olson of NIRS' Radioactive Waste Project, "the risks are real. The nuclear industry said the scenario for the Three Mile Island accident

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was 'incredible,' but that disaster ruined their credibility forever. Russians were told the odds of an accident at Chernobyl were 1 in 10,000 years, but that year turned out to be 1986. Soothing assurances of safety sound hollow given this industry's record and the enormous stakes involved."

"S. 104 is an environmental nightmare in every way," added Mariotte. "It would pre-empt every possible federal, state and local environmental law, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and more. It would unfairly limit the scope of the required Environmental Impact Statement to exclude such basic topics as whether an 'interim' waste dump is even needed. It would set outlandishly high radiation exposure standards. If Sen. Lott stakes his party's environmental claim on this unneeded and dangerous bill, he will lead his party to an environmental Waterloo."

"Fortunately," said Mariotte, "opposition to S. 104 is bipartisan and growing."

"Radioactive waste is a terrible thing to mind," added Olson, "but it is the responsibility of the nuclear utilities to mind their waste until a permanent solution is at hand. The nuclear industry isn't seeking safety, they just want to hand off the title to and liability for the waste to the taxpayers."

Environmental and citizens' organizations against S. 104 (and S.

1936) include NIRS, Public Citizen, Greenpeace, Natural Resources Defense Council, League of Conservation Voters, League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, Military Production Network, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Friends of the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, Three Mile Island Alert, and many more.

Besides unanimous environmental opposition to S. 104, such legislation is also opposed by major religious organizations, including Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, National Ministries of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and office for Church in Society, United Church of Christ. In addition, numerous city governments are on record against the concept, including Los Angeles, Denver, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Decatur, GA; Takoma Park, Mt. Rainier and Greenbelt, MD, among others; as well as county governments such as Ventura and Santa Barbara, CA, Marshall and Anson, NC, and many more.

The "Don't Waste America" petitions neither support nor oppose any specific legislation. Rather, they outline five specific points any radioactive waste legislation should encompass. S. 104 is in direct opposition to all five points. Signatures were collected by NIRS, local environmental groups, and the Greenpeace Tour Project.

(Continued from "Opposition Grows," page 12)

Russia to produce more weapons-usable plutonium from used nuclear reactor fuel. It will help create a surreal cycle by which Russia will make spent fuel out of weapons plutonium only to extract more plutonium out of the reactor spent fuel, thereby perpetuating the threat of theft and diversion," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, President of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Takoma Park, Maryland. Another major concern for coalition members is the impact of the DOE providing significant subsidies to the nuclear power industry to facilitate the use of MOX in commercial reactors. "This smells like polluter pork to me," said Anna Aurilio, a staff scientist with the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. "It is scary that utility executives would be bribed to keep operating their aging, uneconomic reactors," she added.

"We have major problems in the U.S. with nuclear power wastes, and now DOE is going to spend hundreds of millions of tax-payer dollars to subsidize failing, uneconomic reactors, which will generate wastes more dangerous and complicated than what we have today," declared Mary Olson, a spokesperson for the Nuclear Information and Resource Service. "The concerns of citizens in reactor communities, who will be directly affected by the use of MOX fuel, did not influence the development of this policy, but they will have a lot to say about whether it will be implemented," she concluded.

NH Nuclear Plant Faces Bankruptcy Again

from a February 1, 1997, Associated Press article

The twin domes of Seabrook Station nuclear power plant -- one reactor running, the unfinished steel shell of the other rusting in the salt air -- symbolize the 1988 bankruptcy of Seabrook's biggest investor, Public Service Company of New Hampshire. As the state moves to introduce competition among electric utilities by early 1998, Seabrook also serves as a reminder that Public Service could go bankrupt again.

The state's utility restructuring law, passed in May, is designed to give New Hampshire electric customers quick rate relief and move the state's highest-in-the-nation electric rates toward the regional average. To accomplish that, New Hampshire has become the first state to consider an aggressive, market-based approach to determine how much each utility will be allowed to recover from ratepayers in so-called "stranded costs" -- the utility's past investments and contractual obligations.

New Hampshire's approach is being closely watched because most other states considering deregulation appear likely to let utilities recover all of their stranded costs from ratepayers during the transition to competition. New Hampshire's law demands that utilities and their investors share the burden.

"It is crystal clear that in New Hampshire ... it's only going to be partial recovery," said Andrew

Weissman, a Washington lawyer and long-time utility consultant who is advising one of Public Service's biggest customers, Cabletron Systems Inc. of Rochester. The proposed formula for making utilities and their customers share the burden was devised by Richard La Capra, a consultant to the state Public Utilities Commission.

It starts with the average electric rate per kilowatt hour for the region and, for each utility, subtracts the cost of buying, generating, transmitting and distributing power. Whatever is left can be billed to customers as "interim stranded costs" for two years.

The formula's supporters say any expenses that push a utility's rates above the regional average represent bad management in the past. That's the portion they say shareholders should absorb or management should minimize by aggressively cutting costs.

If the commission adopts the approach, everyone will have two years to evaluate the effect of competition on rates, the cost of power and utility investors. The commission then would hold hearings to determine final stranded cost payments for each utility. Most utilities would recover less than half of what they are seeking, Weissman estimates.

Public Service, the state's largest utility with more than 400,000

customers, and its parent company, Northeast Utilities of Berlin, Conn., oppose the market-based approach. "For us, that would mean bankruptcy," said Public Service spokesman Martin Murray.

Consumer advocates say bankruptcy wouldn't necessarily hurt Public Service's customers -- and could even be good for them. "Will the lights go out? I don't think so," said Charlie Higley, senior energy analyst for Public Citizen, a nonprofit group founded by Ralph Nader.

"We are opposed to having the utilities bailed out for their bad management decisions, especially investing in nuclear power," he said. "Bankruptcy is something that happens in the real world. ... Shareholders need to take responsibility for their investments." Both Public Service and state regulators have good reason to avoid another bankruptcy, however. Bankruptcy could postpone competition by giving a federal bankruptcy judge control of Public Service's rates and tying up the state in lawsuits for years.

The utilities argue that because state regulators approved or mandated the construction of power plants and other long-term obligations, the utilities are entitled to full recovery from customers. They say they should only be forced to assume risk for decisions they make in the future.

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Pasta, sauces, bread, salad
by Allan Hetrick of Warm Springs Lodge

7:00 Music and Presentations

7:30 Guest Speaker: David Lochbaum, Union of Concerned Scientists

Mr. Lochbaum is Nuclear Safety Engineer for the Union of Concerned Scientists. He leads UCS's efforts to ensure the safety of nuclear power in the U.S. by monitoring licensed commercial nuclear plants to identify and publicize safety risks of all kinds.

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