

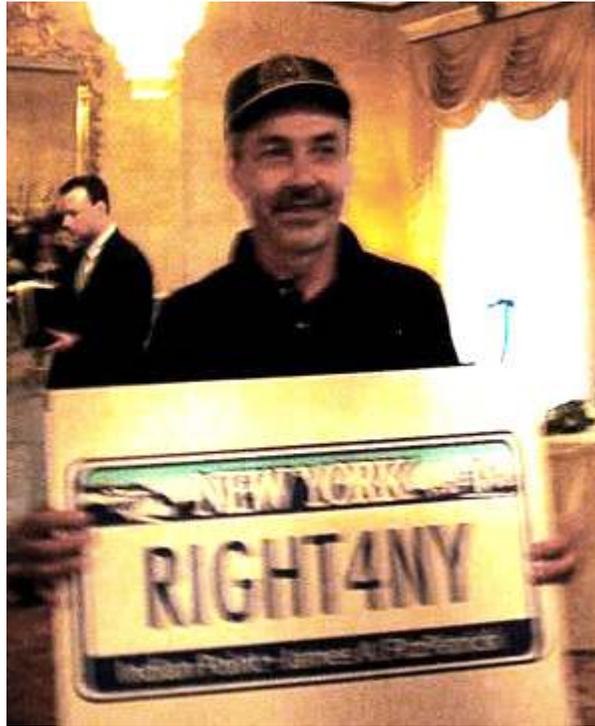
NORTH COUNTY NEWS

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Indian Point

Emotions stirred as relicensing hearings begin

By Abby Luby



Al Grioli from the Carpenters union
at the NRC meeting
on Indian Point relicensing

Union members and Entergy employees showed up in force last week to support the relicensing application of the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant, responding with boos and jeers to those opposing the plant's continued operation. The divisive crowd of over 400 people came to the first public meeting held by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) last week in what promises to be a contentious battle to extend the plant's operating license.

Crowded into the banquet hall at Colonial Terrace in Cortlandt Manor, both sides aired their views for more than two hours on the pros and cons of allowing the plant to operate 20 more years.

The meeting kicked off the lengthy process overseen by the NRC, the federal oversight agency who is reviewing the renewal application submitted by Entergy Nuclear Northeast, the plant owner. The application to extend the operating license is for reactor units 1 and 2, for which the current license expires in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Entergy submitted the application in April.

Jobs at Indian Point

The Coalition of Labor for Energy and Jobs held a press conference in an adjacent hall just before the meeting. Spokespersons urged some 200 union members to speak out in support of Indian Point.

Jerry Connolly, Business Manager of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, said he had worked at the plant in 1964.

"This plant supplies reliable energy to the city and our members depend on Indian Point for jobs," Connolly said.

The coalition is made up by the Boilermakers Local 5, Millwrights and Machine Erectors Local 740 and Utility Workers 1-2. They were joined by the carpenters union and Teamsters International. Many were wearing T-shirts and caps and carrying signs reading "Right4NY."

Bob Seeger, business agent for Millwrights & Machinery, told the men, "We're not sending members into a place that's not safe. We can't afford to lose 2,000 megawatts of electricity (a day). If we did, on a day like today, our beer would get warm, our ice cream would melt and the air conditioners wouldn't run."

The forum was slated as an information meeting to familiarize the public with the re-licensing process. The NRC project manager for Indian Point's relicensing application, Bo Pham, opened the public meeting saying the process could take up to two years.

"We do not duplicate the regulatory process in the renewal process," explained Pham, making clear that re-licensing only looks at how Entergy has managed the aging plant's safety systems and the design and operation of structural components. Pham also stressed that the application was in its preliminary review and has not been formally accepted by the NRC.

Local Reps

Buchanan Mayor Daniel O'Neill lauded the plant's safety and advantages over a fossil fuel plant.

"I can see the plant from my backyard and the people of Buchanan are the ones who live with the plant every day," he said. "If this was a fossil fuel plant it would add to health problems. Nuclear power is so much better in terms of safety and environment."

To counter, Congressmen Eliot Engel and John Hall sent representatives who expressed concern about the ongoing radioactive leaks of Tritium and Strontium-90. Hall's spokesperson, Susan Speer, cited plant safety as the critical issue.

"The plant is located near eight percent of the population of the United States and each week brings another mishap," Speer said on behalf of Hall. Hall has introduced "The Nuclear Power Licensing Reform Act" to oversee the relicensing process by Congress. Hall's prepared statement said "Indian Point should not operate in a vacuum and neither should the relicensing process." Engel spokesperson Joe O'Brien added that "Indian Point is a disaster waiting to happen."

Former Assemblyman Jerry Kremer, who writes opinion pieces for Newsday supporting nuclear power, said "Indian Point is more important than ever because we need the power and we can't build a new plant until 2012."

The former assemblyman from Long Beach and member of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance said nuclear power plants don't release any greenhouse gases. He added that Indian Point provides over 1,000 jobs, eliciting thunderous applause from union members. Clean Energy?

But others at the meeting from grassroots coalitions contended that nuclear power causes greenhouse gases and carbon emissions.

"I've met union people who are looking at alternative energy because they know the jobs it produces," said Marilyn Elie, member of the Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition. "That's the future."

Elie asked Rani Franovich, Branch Chief in the NRC's Division of License Renewal, if the NRC has acknowledged that green house gases produced by the nuclear fuel cycle. Franovich said that it is mentioned in the NRC's generic environmental study.

"But I don't have it in front of me so we will actually have to come back to that question."

Elie persisted by responding, "Does the NRC's generic environmental study validate that the nuclear fuel cycle releases green house gases?"

"Yes, it does," answered Franovich.

Later on, Elie said that greenhouse gases are released in both the production of fuel rods and the refining of uranium in coal fired plants.

Concerned Indian Point opponents asked why the emergency evacuation plan, considered unworkable because of the plant's proximity to dense population areas, was not part of the relicensing application.

Katonah resident Peter Harckham, who lives just outside the evacuation emergency planning zone, said he was one of the 40,000 people that had to evacuate the Harrisburg area during

the meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979.

"We've had evacuation experiences since then with 9/11 and Katrina," said Harckham. "This is serious stuff. You should be putting everything on the table, not looking at only a few major components [of the plant's operation] as business as usual."

Union members were joined by Entergy workers wearing red T-shirts and caps emblazoned with "Entergy." Although both Entergy employees and union members responded to statements with boos and cheers, few got up to speak. One that did was James Slevin of the Business Agent Utility Workers Union of America.

"You can't cut off this power because it can't be replaced," said Slevin. "Nuclear power is here and it is environmentally clean and inexpensive."

Phil Musegaas, of the environmental group Riverkeeper, referred to a letter to the NRC several weeks ago requesting the agency reject Entergy's application because it was incomplete.

"We have yet to hear back from the NRC, so we are repeating our request here in public," he said.

Musegaas asked the NRC about the consideration of spent fuel storage on site at the Buchanan plant as part of the renewal process. "Is there enough space on site to accommodate all the spent fuel as well as 1,000 tons of spent fuel being produced during the relicensing period?"

NRC's Pham said he didn't have the answer. "I don't know if anyone has looked if space is available for spent fuel storage. I do know that Entergy's position is that spent fuel can be safely stored on site. I'll have to get back to you on that."

There is currently over 1,500 tons of irradiated fuel stored in high-density pools at the Indian Point plants. The concern has been since 9/11 that the buildings housing the spent fuel are not designed to repel a terrorist attack. Entergy said in 2003 that its intention was to build on-site storage facilities by late 2007, but to date, is behind schedule.

Musegaas slammed Entergy for polluting the Hudson River with super heated water from a discharge canal which, he said, was decimating the river's fish population.

"The Hudson River is the main recipient of Indian Point's pollution," said Musegaas. "This river does not belong to Entergy as their private dumping ground for radioactive and super heated water that will contaminate our environment for generations. The Hudson River belongs to all of us, it's part of the public trust and it belongs to all Americans, including the union members that are here."

New meeting updating siren system

Entergy pledged last year to rebuild an emergency siren system by January 2007. The company was unable to get some system components to work and failed to meet a second deadline extension to complete the four county siren system.

The NRC imposed a one-time fine of \$30,000, a sum plants are fined on a daily basis. The NRC has requested a meeting with Entergy to discuss technical issues of the siren system, such as dates for testing and completion for the new Emergency Notification System (ENS) with backup power.