

LETTERS

CP&L misleads public by making comparisons to Chernobyl

To the editors:

It is heartening to see The Summer Tar Heel foster debate on the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant. Timely informing of the public is critical since CP&L hopes to load fuel this month and start commercial operation by the end of the year. CP&L has recently spent a lot of money trying to win us over to its point of view on the plant. Some other commentators have studied the discussion. Nevertheless, all citizens have the capacity to decide this issue for themselves, regardless of what the experts say.

Nuclear power is touted as safe, clean and cheap. Specifically, CP&L would have us believe that Shearon Harris is strong enough to withstand the likes of a direct hit from a 747. The Chernobyl plant lacked such a concrete containment structure, and, by implication, a Chernobyl accident could not happen here. No one would deny that Harris is different from the Chernobyl reactor. CP&L misleads us in making the comparison. We

should be more immediately concerned with what might happen inside, not outside, the containment dome. Ways in which the containment design could be employed at Harris could fail are described in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission document NUREG 0956. Moreover, NRC Reactor Systems Division Chief Brian Sheron has said that he is not sure whether a containment dome would have contained the Chernobyl event (The Washington Post, June 1, 1986). In any case, Chernobyl was designed to prevent explosion by a pressure-suppression system. Similar technology is used at about half of commercial U.S. reactors, although not at Harris. In sum, while a Chernobyl-type accident could not happen at Harris, a concrete dome is no guarantee of safety.

Design and technology aside, the practical safety of Harris includes a human component. "Human error" contributed to the Three Mile Island accident and earned CP&L a \$600,000 fine at its Brunswick reac-

tors. Thanks, John deVillie, for your views on human error (STH, June 12, 1986).

CP&L asserts that absolutely no radiological injuries or damage occurred as a result of the TMI accident. The Katagiri Report of the Three Mile Island Public Interest Resource Center will tell you otherwise. Give them a call at (717) 233-4241 for the other side of the story.

Stated conservatively, the jury is still out on the short- and long-term effects of radiation at different dosages. We do know that some lethal radioactive isotopes will be with us for thousands of years to come. The United States has not solved its radioactive waste disposal problem. If you follow the news, you know that Governor Martin and the State of North Carolina have objected to the location of a high-level nuclear waste dump in Wake County and are reluctant to allow a low-level regional dump in the state without further study. In the meanwhile, Shearon Harris would be

accumulating waste on-site, just 15 miles from Raleigh and 20 miles from Chapel Hill.

The most damning arguments against Shearon Harris are economic, however. For example, CP&L will tell us that nuclear fuel is cheaper than fossil fuels. Their publicity never factors in the costs of waste disposal (\$4.5 million per year) and plant decommissioning (\$1-3 billion or more). This is in comparison to CP&L's own estimate of \$1-1.5 billion for converting the plant to coal fuel. The cost of decommissioning the plant in a short 25-40 years would be calculated into CP&L customers' rate base from a year after the plant opens. After decommissioning the plant, a new one would have to be built; a coal plant built today would still be operating then.

Thomas Spencer, in his letter to the STH (June 19, 1986) points out the dangers of coal power. He and others who do their homework must be aware that safe coal technology

is available. The urgency of stopping Shearon Harris has upstaged the ongoing concern of plant opponents for cleaner conventional power also. Moreover, opponents to the nuclear plant favor conservation and least-cost energy planning as solutions to our power dilemma; call Critical Mass at (202) 546-4996 for details.

Finally, to attack opponents of Shearon Harris on the basis of personalities or tactics, as both Thomas Spencer and Scott Greig do (STH, June 19, 1986), is a sidestep to the debate. It also offends the many citizens and government officials who oppose the plant from well-informed positions. Many of these opponents have been active for over a decade on their own, through the North Carolina Conservation Council, through Kudzu Alliance and now through CASH. Perhaps we hear their voices louder now because the stakes are high and time is so short.

Robert Anderson
graduate
romance languages

LETTERS NEEDED

The Summer Tar Heel always welcomes letters provided they are typed double spaced including the author's name, major, and year in school. Drop in the box outside DTH office.

Even the government says operation of nuclear plants is subject to human error

To the editors:

We think it's human to make errors. That's one reason we don't feel safe about a nuclear power plant within 30 miles of us. We know that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has identified horrible nuclear accidents that can happen in American plants and cause more death and destruction than happened at Chernobyl. The NRC Reactor Safety Study says 3,000 square miles (a circle over 60 miles across) could be so contaminated that it could not be used for 100 years. A recent NRC study says a Harris type containment could "quite likely" have early failure in a bad accident. Another study, Dynamic Evacuation Analyses by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (1981) warns that radiation releases could begin half an hour after a nuclear accident starts. These are facts the US government has found. CP&L doesn't seem to advertise them, but CASH thinks you might like to know about them before CP&L starts up a nuclear plant within 25 miles of Chapel Hill.

Mr. Thomas Spencer, who recently wrote to you, may have erred in not checking his sources far enough. Dr. Inhaber's report was withdrawn from distribution by its source, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, due to its errors. Inhaber's report has been called the most discredited scientific paper ever written. (For details, see the work of Dr. John Holdren et al. of University of California, Berkeley e.g., ERG-79-3). The safety of alternatives is discussed in Metzger's report for the National Audubon Society (1981).

Atomic Energy of Canada Limited are the folks whose linear accelerator cancer treatment machine was recently reported to have killed one patient and disabled another due to excessive radiation does delivered because of a computer error — one that happened at least twice. AECL is the Canadian government corporation that promotes nuclear power and the like in Canada. Perhaps Mr. Spencer could have deduced that a possible reason for accusing Dr. Inhaber of pro-nuclear bias was his affiliation with this nuclear corporation. Another reason would be the systematic bias of Inhaber's errors, virtually all of which tend to raise the risks attributed to non-nuclear energy sources.

"To err is human," CASH agrees, and we do make mistakes. We are trying to rescue the Triangle region from a multi-billion dollar mistake called "Shearon Harris Nuclear Plant." It would cost CP&L consumers over \$17 billion (including profits) to operate for 25 years. Sometime after that, it would be nuclear waste to be disposed of, sooner or later, unless it had a bad accident first. We just can't see any reason to charge people higher electric bills to create nuclear waste and an ever-present risk of horrible accidents. We think that would be just plain irresponsible, and we are trying to get information to the public so we and they can stop it.

Wells Eddleman
CASH Regional Steering Committee
Chapel Hill

CASH sensible but CP&L deceives

To the editors:

What fun Scott Greig's column on "Shearon Harris" was. What was he smoking when he wrote it? Shearon Harris nuclear plant has been opposed since 1971 by folks in Chapel Hill. Among them in the early days, were such Grateful Dead fans as James Wallace now the Mayor, and Jane Sharp, the past President of both the North Carolina Consumers Council and the Conservation Council of North Carolina.

Over 500 citizens from all walks of life signed a newspaper ad opposing the Harris plant. Why does CP&L get laughed at? It may be because they try to sell us public relations fantasies like, radiation from the Harris plant could never reach Chapel Hill after an accident. (Seen any magic radiation barriers lately?) The Harris plant is economical and will create jobs. (Actually, its cost is

so high that it will raise industries electric bills by 25 percent or more, and it will destroy more jobs than it can create.) Shearon Harris is none of Chapel Hill's business.

You can trust the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to keep CP&L in line. (The NRC certified Three Mile Island safe soon before that accident. They OK'd CP&L's Brunswick plant improvements in 1979, and in the next four years fined CP&L nearly \$750,000 for repeated violations of NRC requirements at Brunswick. That included an unmonitored radiation release and repeated failures to test containment.

The \$600,000 fine CP&L got in 1983 was like one for rolling through a stop sign. (There is a nuclear insurance company that won't insure a handful of U.S. nuclear companies. Reportedly, CP&L and the owners of Three Mile Island are among the

few.)

Why try to stop it now? Because for 15 years the official "regulators" have not listened to the public when the public cried out against the excessive costs and unnecessary risks of the Harris power plant. If a drunk driver had been getting away from the police for 15 years, would that mean they shouldn't catch him when they have the chance?

CP&L leaders seem to rely on public relations. CASH relies on ordinary peoples' good sense and information from experts who are not paid by the nuclear power industry. I hope Scott Greig has a pleasant time in Charlotte, surrounded by four Duke Power nuclear plants with weak containments. Maybe they could have used a CASH there years ago.

Steve Katz
Chapel Hill

Greig's drunken apathy deserves rude awakening in his Troll's booth

To the editors:

It is ironic that the so-called "liberal fishwrap," the DTH, was the home for two anti-CASH columns (not to mention a column embracing Reagan's proposed abrogation of the SALT II treaty) in its June 19 issue. The less said about Scott Greig's column, the better. Greig apparently is championing the cause of social apathy in the guise of warning against blindly following others. Frankly, if Greig is going to sit blissfully unaware in the back booth at Troll's, then he fully deserves the rude awakening of a major nuclear accident in the Chapel Hill vicinity. Let's hope he's sober enough to evacuate. In fact, the apathy championed by Greig may well explain why the Shearon Harris opposition (which began in 1971, with the Conservation Council of North Carolina's efforts) was unable to prevent the construction of the plant.

On the other hand, Thomas Spencer's letter raises several points that merit more serious discussion. CASH may well be guilty as charged of playing to public fears in order to gain support. But that fear is hardly groundless, given the experience of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl plus CP&L's abysmal safety record at the Brunswick plant.

While Spencer is correct in pointing out that other energy sources, such as coal and oil, are far from hazard free, there is a difference in the degree and kinds of risks involved in conventional and nuclear energy production. Some miners and construction workers are going to be injured and killed in conventional accidents. But this is a risk that they are willing to take in the course of earning a living, just as police officers, airline pilots, and volunteer soldiers do. Has a voting majority from the Shearon Harris area been

allowed to declare its willingness (or unwillingness) to take the risk of nuclear power?

The atmospheric and environmental damages resulting from the burning of oil and coal, causing smog, acid rain, the greenhouse effect, and ozone depletion, to name a few, is an important concern. While the extent and endurance of this pollution are uncertain, a shift to clearer fuels such as natural gas and solar power appears to be warranted. But is it sensible to trade one group of pollutant fuels of uncertain levels of environmental damage for nuclear energy and the certainty of radioactive half-lives extending into thousands of years? Add to this the risk of a major nuclear accident and the choice becomes even less appealing.

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