

CP&L, Local Governments Battle Over Nuclear Waste

By GINNY SCIABBARRASI
City Editor

When is it time to call it quits? Local activists and officials say not until their concerns about the expansion at an area nuclear plant are answered to their satisfaction.

Carolina Power & Light Co. filed a routine application with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a permit to expand the storage capacity at the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant.

That was more than two years ago.

Once local officials caught wind of the proposal, the protests began, reminiscent of when the plans to build the plant became public knowledge in the mid-1980s.

"We've got to live with this plant for the rest of its life," said Carrboro Board of Aldermen member Allen Spalt. "It's easy to be involved when the issue is so clear."

The plant is located in Wake County, but right on the border of Chatham County and only 15 miles from Orange County.

Local officials fear an accident at the plant could affect a 50-mile radius, which would include the UNC campus.

"(The plant) is located as far as it could get from Raleigh but still be in the Wake County tax base," Spalt said. "It's very close to Chatham County, which doesn't have any control."

The Orange County Board of Commissioners have filed repeated lawsuits and appeals to the NRC and the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, a branch of the NRC.

These appeals have been denied, the most recent coming in early March. CP&L was given the go-ahead with its plans to open two additional nuclear

waste storage pools, which would make it the largest nuclear waste storage facility in the country.

"The NRC and ASLB have determined the plan is safe," said CP&L spokesman Keith Poston. "We expect the full NRC will ultimately reaffirm the plan is safe."

"All the concerns Orange County has raised have been met by the ASLB and the NRC. We believe there are no issues that have not been examined."

But opponents to the plans for expansion said the rulings have been unfairly biased.

"It's all stacked against (Orange County)," said Chatham County Commissioner Gary Phillips. "The NRC rules against the nuclear industry less than 1 percent of the time. They're less of a watchdog and more of a cheerleader."

Orange County Commissioner Stephen Halkiotis said the county had no plans to give up fighting the expansion at the plant anytime soon.

"The county continues to fight the battle along with the Chapel Hill Town Council, the Carrboro aldermen and other local governments, and we appreciate the help. We've authorized our attorney to go to the next level, the federal level," he said.

"The fight is not yet over." The N.C. Waste Awareness and Reduction Network - a local watchdog agency - and the commissioners have solicited help from a higher level, seeking aid from Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., and Rep. David Price, D-N.C.

Both congressmen have said they will continue to investigate the NRC rulings, but nothing definite has been done.

Edwards held a conference call with members from the various local governments Monday, pledging to further

look into the matter.

But Poston said CP&L has more than surpassed its obligations to the county, holding hearings and presenting evidence to the safety of the plan.

"It's been a long process," he said. "Since 1999, we've hosted more than 100 presentations to local groups - it's something we've spent lots of time explaining why we're doing this."

"It's been a marathon. We hope the finish line is nearing."

CP&L officials met with members of N.C. WARN and several local officials last week to discuss the growing concerns.

"They acknowledge now their public image has been damaged by all this - I think we're making cracks in the mountain," Phillips said.

"CP&L has signaled they'd like to work with us rather than against us, and we'd like that as well."

Poston said the expansion at the plant also was a burden for CP&L.

The federal government pledged to create a national repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada that would be operational by 1998.

But that plan has not yet been implemented.

"We remain frustrated the federal government hasn't come up with a permanent solution," he said. "We've put in \$500 million of customers' money to help find a permanent solution that was supposed to be available three years ago."

But Phillips said the fact that no solution had been made on the federal level shows the growing concern about nuclear energy and waste.

"Nevada has said no - it's a dangerous technology and no one wants this," he said.

N.C. WARN argues there is a safer

Nuclear Meltdown

The Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant has been the topic of hot debate for officials.

■ **Dec. 21, 2000** - Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation approves CP&L expansion plans at the Shearon Harris plant.

■ **Feb. 14, 2001** - The full NRC suspends its staff decision to allow expansion to go forward, wanting to wait for the ruling of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, a branch of the NRC.

■ **March 1, 2001** - The ASLB approves CP&L expansion. Orange County appeals to five-member full commission.

■ **April 2001** - NRC Office of Inspector General investigates NRC staff ruling internally, looking into the ruling that came before the ASLB decision.

■ **April 30, 2001** - Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., holds a conference call with local officials and activists, who ask for his help.

SOURCE: DTH ARCHIVES



DTH FILE PHOTO

Mark Marcoplos, a member of the board of directors of N.C. WARN, carries the N.C. flag during a march to CP&L's offices on Oct. 18, 2000.

alternative to the pool storage, which bunches rods of uranium pellets under water. They advocate dry cask storage, where the spent fuel is stored within layers of concrete.

The fuel is then more easily transported on land to other storage facilities, proponents say.

N.C. WARN members said CP&L has dismissed the option because it is more expensive.

But Poston said the nuclear industry standards have shown both storage methods to be effective.

"Experts show dry cask and pool storage are equally safe - the technology has been used for 50 years nationwide and at Shearon Harris for the past 11 (years)," he said. "Our industry is heavily regulated."

But Phillips said the fight for an open

safety hearing will continue, even if the appeals are denied again.

"(N.C. WARN Director) Jim Warren is a never-say-die kinda guy. There's more civil disobedience in the future."

"If we just win in the court of human opinion, that's something."

Halkiotis said the commissioners would wait to see the results of the pending appeal in front of the five-member full NRC and then re-evaluate their position.

"The best-case scenario is that they would be willing to have an open hear-

ing and sit down and negotiate these plans.

"To not have a hearing is absolutely ludicrous."

But Poston said he hopes a resolution can be reached peacefully between the two opposing sides.

"We hope to have the issue resolved before it affects our customers," he said.

"It's critical we address this situation and move forward."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

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