



Nuclear Energy Information Service

Illinois' Nuclear Power Watchdog since 1981

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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release:
March 25, 2011

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Sens. Kirk and Durbin “grill” regulators – study to “know”? or, dog-and-pony show?

Illinois nuclear power watchdog hopes for best, braces for the worst

CHICAGO—As Illinois’ two Senators prepare to question federal and state regulators about conditions at Illinois reactors and our preparedness to meet emergencies, Illinois’ nuclear watchdog organization remains skeptical, and asks – is this an earnest attempt to enact meaningful changes? Or a political grandstanding event to assuage the growing alarm and recent negative turn in public opinion against nuclear power?

“While our organization favors and promotes the responsible phase out of nuclear power, much of our work over the past 30 years has been to insure that the nuclear power that is forced on this nation is operated with the highest levels of safety and security possible,” explains David Kraft, director of NEIS.

“When we see the President call for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to conduct a ‘review,’ and our Senators conducting this meeting even before the Fukushima disaster has ended, we have to ask what good will that do when the fox is being asked its opinion on hen-house design,” Kraft says.

According to NEIS the historic record shows an overwhelming preponderance of bias given to the nuclear industry concerns over public-raised concerns, Kraft says. And if this were merely a matter of the opinions of public interest groups, that assertion might be called into some question. However, even previous NRC regulators share this view. In a March 23 article in Foreign Affairs online edition, former NRC Commissioner Victor Gilinsky writes:

“Unfortunately, U.S. regulators have been overly accommodating to the industry they supervise....NRC reviews...are heavily weighted towards accepting the validity of past technical conclusions. Rather than simply green lighting old nuclear plants, officials need to reverse the burden of proof and examine more carefully whether past acceptances of old safety systems remain valid today.....

“There should be no illusions, however, about the likely result of this [Presidential] review....The NRC regulation that covers safety upgrades (called “backfits” in regulatory jargon) is strongly biased against any costly improvements.”

“This is from an ‘insider’,” Kraft points out. “We cannot tolerate this kind of circus attitude towards nuclear safety in the most nuclear reliant state in the U.S.,” Kraft says. Illinois has 14 reactors – 11 operating, 3 permanently and prematurely closed – more than any other state. If it were a country, Illinois would be the 12th largest nuclear power in the world.

NEIS has requested and been granted a meeting with Governor Quinn to discuss these proposed re-evaluations and inspections. The meeting will take place April 4th in Chicago.

“Einstein said you can’t solve a problem using the same thinking you used to create it. If this review is merely an exercise in ‘regulatory compliance,’ it is a waste of time and money,” Kraft asserts. “What’s needed now is an independent, ‘out-of-the-box’ dialog from all affected parties about nuclear safety issues. Anything short of that is just political theatre,” concludes Kraft.