



NRC NEWS

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LICENSING BOARD GRANTS MOTION EXPEDITING MARCH 9th PROCEEDINGS IN PLYMOUTH, MASS., ON PILGRIM LICENSE RENEWAL CONTENTION

A three-judge panel of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) has granted a motion from the parties involved in the Pilgrim nuclear power plant license renewal review that will expedite proceedings scheduled for Wednesday, March 9, in Plymouth, Mass. The ASLB is an independent judicial arm of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

On Feb. 18, the ASLB held a conference call with the parties to discuss a motion regarding the issue that is to be the subject of the March 9th session, which is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at the John Carver Inn, 25 Summer St. in Plymouth. The parties include the non-profit citizens' organization Pilgrim Watch, which submitted the contention; Entergy, which owns and operates the plant; and the NRC staff. The contention involves Entergy's evaluation of Severe Accident Mitigation Alternatives, or SAMAs, for the plant. In place of an oral evidentiary hearing involving testimony by expert witnesses, the parties asked that the ASLB instead rule on the contention solely based on pre-filed testimony and exhibits.

In an order issued on Feb. 22, the ASLB granted the motion. However, the ASLB also asked the parties to submit proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law, which are essentially summaries of their positions and written closing arguments. In addition, the parties will be allowed to give brief closing arguments, limited to 10 minutes each, on March 9.

Besides the closing arguments on the SAMAs contention, the ASLB will also hear oral arguments on March 9th regarding three new contentions submitted by Pilgrim Watch. In one of those contentions, the group argues that Entergy's SAMAs analysis must be revised to account for issues associated with clean-up responsibility and funding in the event of a severe accident. In the other two contentions, Pilgrim Watch challenges Entergy's aging management program addressing aging management of certain electrical cables.

With respect to the SAMAs contention, nuclear power plant owners, when developing a license renewal application, are required under NRC regulations to consider safety enhancements, such as new equipment or building modifications, to reduce the risks of severe accidents. A cost-benefit analysis of potential changes is part of the consideration process.

Pilgrim Watch has asserted there were flaws with the methodologies used by Entergy to determine post-accident environmental effects, thereby influencing decision-making on possible changes.

Entergy submitted its application for a 20-year extension of the Pilgrim operating license on Jan. 25, 2006. The plant's initial 40-year operating license is due to expire on June 8, 2012, but will remain in effect until the NRC has issued a final decision on the license renewal application. Documents related to the license renewal application are available on the NRC's web site at: www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/licensing/renewal/applications/pilgrim.html.

Documents for the Pilgrim proceeding are available in the NRC's online document library at: www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/regulatory/adjudicatory.html.

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