

Associated Press Picture & Information Slide Show June 20, 2011



Photo 1 of 23



This photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission shows a 10-gallon-per-minute leak which sprung Oct. 19, 2007, in rusted piping that carried essential service water at the Byron nuclear plant in Illinois. The water is needed to cool the reactor in an emergency. The plant was immediately taken offline for repairs. Federal regulators have been working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards, or simply failing to enforce them, an investigation by The Associated Press has found. Time after time, officials at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission have decided that original regulations were too strict, arguing that safety margins could be eased without peril, according to records and interviews. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)



Photo 2 of 23



This March 16, 2011 photo shows steam rising from cooling towers at Exelon Corp.'s nuclear plant in Byron, Ill. Illinois has six nuclear plants, with a total of 11 reactors, more than any other state in the U.S. in 2010. Exelon, which has acknowledged violating Illinois state groundwater standards, agreed to pay \$1.2 million to settle state and county complaints over the tritium leaks in Illinois' Braidwood, Dresden and Byron sites. The NRC also sanctioned Exelon. (AP Photo/Robert Ray)

Photo 3 of 23



This June 14, 2007, photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission shows some of the extensive rust that accumulated on piping carrying essential service water at the Byron nuclear plant in Illinois. The water is needed to cool the reactor in an emergency. A leak in the system forced the plant to go offline for repairs later that year. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)

Photo 4 of 23



FILE - This Monday, Dec. 15, 2003 file picture shows the then-idled Davis-Besse nuclear power station in Oak Harbor, Ohio. The Davis-Besse plant was shut down for two years starting in 2002 after inspectors then found an acid leak that nearly ate through a steel cap on the reactor vessel at the plant. It was the most extensive corrosion seen at a U.S. nuclear reactor. (AP Photo/Mark Duncan)

Photo 5 of 23



This undated photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission shows a 5-by-5-inch hole in a section cut from the top of the reactor vessel at the Davis-Besse nuclear plant in Ohio. Discovered in February 2002, the hole was eaten by boric acid that spilled from inside the reactor through cracks in the vessel head. Only three-eighths of an inch of steel cladding remained, making a reactor breach likely in as little as two months, by the NRC's estimate. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)

Photo 6 of 23



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Photo 19 of 23



In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, an armed security guard works outside the control room at the Oyster Creek nuclear plant in Lacey Township, N.J. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December 2010 that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

Photo 8 of 23



This Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2009 picture shows the Indian Point nuclear power plant along the banks of the Hudson River in Buchanan, N.Y., about 25 miles north of New York City. As of 2011, the now-closed reactor 1 is the smaller dome at center; the 36-year-old reactor 2 is at left and the 34-year-old reactor 3 is at right. Applications to extend the lives of pressurized water units 2 and 3 are under review by the NRC. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

Photo 9 of 23



This April 2006 photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in response to a public records request by The Associated Press shows a badly rusted valve in a containment spraying system that was initially a focus of concern as workers tried to find the source of leaks at the closed Indian Point 1 reactor in New York state. The leakage was eventually traced to spent fuel pools. The reactor had been shut down since 1974. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)

Photo 10 of 23



This July 2007 photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in response to a public records request by The Associated Press shows a badly rusted valve inside a vault at the closed Indian Point 1 nuclear plant in New York state. The pipe was part of a containment spraying system that was initially a focus of concern as workers tried to find the source of leaks at the site. The leakage was eventually traced to spent fuel pools. The reactor had been shut down since 1974. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)

Photo 11 of 23



In this Friday, April 20, 2007 picture, Tracy Sudoko, a control room agent at the Indian Point nuclear power plant, works on a report at the facility in Buchanan, N.Y. Commercial nuclear reactors in the United States were designed and licensed for 40 years. When the first ones were being built in the 1960s and 1970s, it was expected that they would be replaced with improved models long before those licenses expired. Instead, 66 of the 104 operating units have been relicensed for 20 more years, mostly with scant public attention. As of 2011, renewal applications are under review for 16 other reactors. Applications to extend the lives of pressurized water units 2 and 3 at Indian Point, each more than 34 years old, are under review by the NRC. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

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In this Friday, April 20, 2007 picture, a caution sign marks an area surrounding a pool that protects spent nuclear fuel at the Indian Point nuclear power station in Buchanan, N.Y. Because the federal government has failed to find a location for permanent storage of spent fuel, many tons of highly radioactive used reactor rods are kept in pools inside reactor containment buildings. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

Photo 13 of 23



FILE - This Saturday, Jan. 8, 2005 file picture shows the Oconee Nuclear Station in Seneca, S.C. - one of the oldest nuclear power plants in the United States. Federal regulators have been working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards, or simply failing to enforce them, an investigation by The Associated Press has found. Time after time, officials at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission have decided that original regulations were too strict, arguing that safety margins could be eased without peril, according to records and interviews. (AP Photo/Mary Ann Chastain)

Photo 14 of 23



This spring 2004 photo made available by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission shows the finish peeling off a wall at the Oconee nuclear plant in South Carolina. An NRC inspector general's report in September 2007 said the operator had failed to manage this aging problem as it promised during relicensing. Even mundane deterioration at a reactor can carry harsh consequences. For example, peeling paint and debris can be swept toward pumps that circulate cooling water in a reactor accident. (AP Photo/Nuclear Regulatory Commission)

Photo 15 of 23



This Thursday, May 26, 2011 picture shows the Nuclear Regulatory Commission headquarters in Rockville, Md. Federal regulators have repeatedly weakened or failed to enforce safety standards so the nation's aging nuclear plants can keep operating, an Associated Press investigation shows. Working in concert with industry, officials at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission have decided time after time that original rules were too strict, arguing that safety margins could be eased without peril, according to an examination of tens of thousands of pages of government and industry studies, test results, inspection reports and regulatory policy statements filed over four decades. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)



Photo 16 of 23



FILE - In this May 10, 2011, file photo Gregory Jaczko, chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, listens to a question from reporters after touring the Indian Point Energy Center in Buchanan, N.Y. Federal regulators have been working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards, or simply failing to enforce them, an investigation by The Associated Press has found. In public pronouncements, industry and government say aging is well under control. "I see an effort on the part of this agency to always make sure that we're doing the right things for safety. I'm not sure that I see a pattern of staff simply doing things because there's an interest to reduce requirements \_ that's certainly not the case," Jaczko said in an interview at agency headquarters in Rockville, Md. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)

Photo 17 of 23



In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, workers walk in front of a large square building that houses the nuclear reactor at the Oyster Creek nuclear plant in Lacey Township, N.J. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December 2010 that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

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In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, an Exelon employee walks past equipment in the turbine building at the Oyster Creek nuclear plant in Lacey Township, N.J. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December 2010 that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

Photo 19 of 23



In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, an armed security guard works outside the control room at the Oyster Creek nuclear plant in Lacey Township, N.J. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December 2010 that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

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In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, Exelon's Fiona Roberts stands in a machine that identifies her and scans for radioactivity as she leaves an area at the Oyster Creek nuclear generating plant in Lacey Township, N.J. The facility in southern New Jersey is the country's oldest operating nuclear reactor. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

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In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010 picture, Exelon's Pete Tamburro, left, and David Benson stand outside the Oyster Creek nuclear plant, background, in Lacey Township, N.J. Spokesman Benson said the reactor "is as safe today as when it was built." Yet plant officials have been trying to arrest rust on its 100-foot-high, radiation-blocking steel drywell for decades. The problem was declared solved long ago, but a rust patch was found again in late 2008. Benson said the new rust was only the size of a dime, but acknowledged there was "some indication of water getting in." (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

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In this Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010 picture, Oyster Creek nuclear plant program engineer Roger Gayley speaks to a crowded room in Lacey Township, N.J., during a public hearing on a state proposal to force the Oyster Creek nuclear plant to build cooling towers to protect Barnegat Bay from its hot water discharges. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)

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In this Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010 picture, William de Camp, at podium at background left, speaks in a crowded room in Lacey Township, N.J. during a public hearing on a state proposal to force the Oyster Creek nuclear plant to build cooling towers to protect Barnegat Bay from its hot water discharges. Called "Oyster Creak" by some critics because of its aging problems, this boiling water reactor began running in 1969 and ranks as the country's oldest operating commercial nuclear power plant. Its license was extended in 2009 until 2029, though utility officials announced in December that they'll shut the reactor 10 years earlier, rather than build state-ordered cooling towers. (AP Photo/Mel Evans)