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Groups seek delay in Westinghouse reactor approval

Thu, Jun 16 2011

* Westinghouse still sees NRC approval later in 2011

* Southern & Scana to use AP1000 in new nuclear plants

NEW YORK, June 16 (Reuters) - Environmental groups, on Thursday, again asked the U.S. nuclear regulator to delay approval of Westinghouse Electric's AP1000 reactor design.

They claim, among other things, the company continues to change the design during the certification process.

Any delay in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's approval of the design could hold up construction of the first new reactors to be built in the United States since the Three Mile Island accident in 1979.

Two energy companies in the U.S. Southeast have already started preliminary construction work on new, multi-billion dollar reactors based on the AP1000 design--Southern Co's (SO.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) Vogtle nuclear stations in Georgia and Scana Corp's (SCG.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) Summer plants in South Carolina.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission had planned to approve the AP1000 design as early as this summer and to issue construction and operating licenses to Southern and Scana to build two 1,100-megawatt reactors each this year.

Westinghouse spokesman Scott Shaw told Reuters the company still expects the NRC to certify the AP1000 design later this year.

On Monday, Westinghouse submitted to the NRC "Revision 19" of the AP1000 design document, which included updated technical reports on the reactor's shield building and containment vessel.

In a release earlier this week, Westinghouse said the changes in the revision were "clarifications and minor corrections, which have no safety significance, and provide resolution of all known NRC open items needed for final rule making."

Environmental groups, however, believe Westinghouse has made "mistakes and omissions," in its application and want the NRC to halt the AP1000 approval process.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES?

Scott Burnell, a spokesman for the NRC, said the agency's staff will have to look at the latest Westinghouse revision and determine what impact, if any, it will have on the schedule for approving the design.

Burnell noted that, any time during a licensing process "substantive" changes to what is being reviewed can trigger additional public comment.

He could not say whether there would be an additional public comment period or how long it may last.

The environmental groups, including NC WARN, Friends of the Earth and the AP1000 Oversight Group, also want the NRC to include any lessons learned from the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan in March, before working on new reactor designs or construction and operating applications.

"Continuing to pretend that a robust design has emerged (with the AP1000) is to blatantly ignore the risk of multiple operational failures, the continuing review shortcuts being taken by NRC staff, and the hard, but essential, lessons of Fukushima," Tom Clements, Southeastern nuclear campaign coordinator at Friends of the Earth, said in a release.

NEW REACTORS

Southern expects the two new reactors at Vogtle to enter service in 2016 and 2017 at a total estimated cost of about \$14 billion. Scana expects its two Summer reactors to begin operating in 2016 and 2019, for an estimated cost of about \$10 billion.

The AP1000 is important for more than just Southern and Scana. It's the most popular design for proposed new reactors in the United States, claiming 14 of the 26 new units that have already been filed with the NRC.

Westinghouse is majority owned by Japanese multinational conglomerate Toshiba Corp (6502.T: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) and U.S. construction firm Shaw Group Inc (SHAW.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)).

For a complete list of all new reactors proposed, see FACTBOX-U.S. proposed new nuclear power reactors [ID:nN16230020] (Reporting by [Scott DiSavino](#) and [Eileen O'Grady](#); Editing by [Carole Vaporean](#))

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