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LICENSING BOARD TO HOLD EVIDENTIARY HEARING ON MARCH 9th IN PLYMOUTH, MASS., ON PILGRIM LICENSE RENEWAL CONTENTION

A three-judge panel of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) will conduct an evidentiary hearing on Thursday, March 9, in Plymouth, Mass., regarding a contention raised in the Pilgrim nuclear power plant license renewal proceeding. The ASLB is an independent judicial arm of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The hearing will begin at 9 a.m. at the John Carver Inn, 25 Summer St. in Plymouth, Mass. The session is open for public observation.

The contention that will be the subject of the hearing was submitted by the non-profit citizens' organization Pilgrim Watch and involves Severe Accident Mitigation Alternatives, or SAMAs. When developing a license renewal application, nuclear power plant owners 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 the plant's owner, Entergy, to determine post-accident environmental effects, thereby influencing decision-making on possible changes.

Specifically, the focus of the hearing on March 9 will be the modeling used by Entergy to calculate the airborne release of radioactivity following a severe accident.

The SAMAs contention was one of five initially submitted by Pilgrim Watch regarding the relicensing application, of which two were admitted to the proceeding. A hearing on the first contention, involving the company's aging-management plan for buried tanks and piping containing radioactive liquids, was held in 2008 and resulted in a ruling in favor of Entergy. The SAMAs contention was dismissed by a majority of the Board without a hearing. That decision was appealed by Pilgrim Watch. On March 26, 2010, the Commission remanded a part of the contention to the ASLB for a hearing. That hearing will take place on March 9.

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 Commission has issued a final ruling on the 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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