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Nuclear Regulatory Commission must come clean on reactor safety hazard

Beyond Nuclear and Mark I reactor communities petition NRC to suspend Fukushima-style reactors in US and demand NRC reveal what they know about failed “fix” for US reactors

TAKOMA PARK, MD – Following on an [exposé in the *New York Times*](#) and the April 13, 2011 filing of its own emergency enforcement petition to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Beyond Nuclear is renewing its call on the NRC to suspend the operating licenses of [21 Mark I](#) units in the United States. The US Mark I reactors are nearly identical to the Fukushima reactors that exploded into shambles and that are leaking radioactivity into the air and sea.

[A May 17, 2011 *New York Times* article](#) reveals that an experimental venting system installed on the flawed containment system of the General Electric Mark I Boiling Water Reactors (BWR) failed to function as designed on Units 1, 2 and 3 of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The article points out that the venting system is identical to the same experimental “fix” installed in the late 1980s and early 1990s on a number of the 23 GE Mark I BWRs now operating in the US.

Beyond Nuclear charges that while some U.S. Mark I reactors possess the same now demonstrated failed venting systems, the NRC is aware that other Mark I reactor operators may not even have installed – and some may even have uninstalled – the now controversial venting systems. If the venting systems had worked as designed they would have prevented extensive damage to containment from the devastating hydrogen explosions witnessed at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

“The NRC left the retrofit of this experimental venting system to the voluntarily discretion of the US reactor operators,” said Paul Gunter, Director of Reactor Oversight at Beyond Nuclear. “Now that this experimental containment vent is demonstrated to have failed at Fukushima, we need to know who installed it at US plants, who didn’t and the justification for the continued operation of these deeply flawed and dangerous reactors,” he said.

“We want the NRC to hold a public meeting in each of the emergency planning zones for these reactors and incorporate the public’s concerns into its review,” he continued. “NRC should revoke all prior approvals for the installation of the vent and instead require operators to submit a license amendment request with full public hearing rights,” he said.

“The revelations in the *New York Times* and our petition regarding the dangerously low safety bar that NRC has set for a fundamentally flawed reactor design should give everyone living near a Mark I significant cause for alarm,” Gunter added. “This experimental vent is not a ‘safety enhancement’, it is a significant compromise of what was originally licensed as a leak-tight design,” he concluded. “NRC and industry are selling public safety extremely short if there is a severe accident here in the United States,” he said in conclusion.

Beyond Nuclear and a growing number of safe energy organizations and impacted communities from around the US Mark I sites are petitioning the NRC to suspend the operating licenses of these reactors. The NRC has scheduled a public meeting at its Rockville, MD headquarters on June 8, 2011 from 2pm to 4pm at which it will receive supplemental information from the petitioners and ask questions about documentation submitted by the Beyond Nuclear co-petitioners as required under federal law. The press and public are welcome at the meeting which is also accessible via a toll free telephone bridge line.

The Beyond Nuclear petition, which can be found on the Beyond Nuclear website at: http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/mark-1-campaign/bn_2206_ge_bwr_041320111.pdf requests that the NRC suspend operations at all [21 Mark I reactors](#) identical to Fukushima until it has completed a thorough review of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe and its implications for the US Mark 1 units and that the review include NRC convening public meetings in each of the Mark 1 emergency planning zones to take testimony from the public and their experts.

The petition also demands that the NRC revoke pre-approval of the experimental hardened vent system granted in 1989 in Generic Letter 89-16 as an industry voluntary initiative and then require all Mark I operators to complete a license amendment process to include the opportunity for public hearing with full hearing rights.

The Beyond Nuclear petition further demands that the NRC require that the operators of all [24 Mark I with the elevated and overloaded "spent" fuel pools](#) above and outside of the rated containment system retrofit those vulnerable systems with Class E1 emergency backup power systems. These systems includes independent emergency power generators and backup battery systems rated for up to 72 hours to provide reliable cooling capability during loss of offsite power.

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Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic.

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