

**NUCLEAR REALITY CAMPAIGN \* PUBLIC CITIZEN \* RADIATION AND PUBLIC  
HEALTH PROJECT \* ALLIANCE FOR A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT**

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Public Interest Groups Urge Exelon to Address Nuclear Plant Security  
Problems, Avoid Quest for Longer Operating Licenses**

PHILADELPHIA – Using the aging Limerick nuclear power plant as a case study as to why nuclear energy is a failing proposition in the U.S., four consumer groups today urged Exelon, the nation’s largest nuclear operator, to recognize the dangers of nuclear power by choosing not to renew the operating license of its plant located just 20 miles outside Philadelphia. The groups rallied in front of Exelon-owned PECO headquarters in downtown Philadelphia to urge energy companies such as Exelon to address security risks at the Limerick and other reactors, and to create a new energy plan for future generations that will not create environmental and health risks to consumers.

Exelon owns and operates the Limerick plant in Limerick Township. The Limerick Unit 1 reactor’s operating license expires 20 years from today, which means Exelon is now eligible to apply for a 20-year extension. Exelon has not said it intends to renew the Limerick license specifically, but has said it expects to renew most if not all its licenses eventually. It has received or is seeking extensions at four of its ten plants currently. Of 103 operating reactors in the U.S., 26 have received such extensions to date, and an additional 18 applications are pending. None have been rejected.

“Limerick is a prime example of security problems and risks that we shouldn’t see in an industry like nuclear power three years after September 11, yet we do,” said Brendan Hoffman, a nuclear energy organizer with Washington, D.C.-based Public Citizen. “A reactor with the same design as Limerick would never be built today. The industry and the NRC’s soft approach is unacceptable.” Public Citizen released a report last week criticizing the inadequacy of domestic security measures that have been taken since the September 11 attacks across a spectrum of industries, including nuclear; it is available at <http://www.homelandunsecured.org/>.

Also, in August, the Nuclear Security Coalition, a national coalition of more than 45 groups including Public Citizen, petitioned the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to review a security vulnerability present in the design of 32 reactors nation-wide. In those reactors, of which Limerick is one, the highly radioactive spent fuel is stored about five stories above ground and outside the reinforced containment dome that houses the reactor, making it especially vulnerable to aircraft penetration.

Further, the groups pointed to NRC’s misguided new plan to allow the private security firm Wackenhut to train and manage the adversary teams that perform “force-on-force” mock terrorist attacks against nuclear plants to measure readiness. Wackenhut already guards nearly half the plants in the country, including Limerick and all Exelon-owned plants, which poses a conflict of interest and renders such vital security tests meaningless.

While such ongoing security problems should be enough on their own to prohibit a 20-year extension on Limerick’s operating license, the groups also described the health risks from nuclear power and criticized the failure to deal effectively with the waste problem.

“It’s time that we take seriously the need to move to pollution-free sources of energy as quickly as possible,” said Geoff Ower, founder of the Illinois-based Nuclear Reality Campaign, a national student coalition. “We have nowhere to store the waste from nuclear power currently, and Exelon is going around seeking to build new plants and extend operating licenses, which will just create even more waste.” Last week, Energy Action, a coalition of student groups including the Nuclear Reality Campaign held nearly 300 rallies around the country to declare independence from polluting energy sources, in the first Energy Independence Day. Exelon has also taken steps toward building a new reactor in Illinois.

Joseph Mangano, MPH, MPA, a public health specialist and national coordinator of the Radiation and Public Health Project, pointed to the threats to public health and safety associated with nuclear reactors. The current rate of thyroid cancer, which is caused by radiation exposure, exceeds the national rate in all southeast Pennsylvania counties, led by Montgomery County (87% higher for males, 59% higher for females). A study of radioactive strontium-90 in baby teeth near the Limerick found the highest levels of areas near seven plants studied. “Routine nuclear operations, and not just a major accident or attack, can harm people,” Mangano said.

There are nine additional operating nuclear reactors within 80 miles of the two Limerick reactors, making it the area with the densest concentration of reactors in the country. Mangano has also tracked childhood cancer mortality in Montgomery County, finding that it increased 80% from the late 1980s, when Limerick began operating, to the 1990s. Rates in the rest of Pennsylvania and the U.S. decreased 25% and 18%, respectively, during that time. The county rate is now more than 18% above the state and national rates. Of forty U.S. counties with a population over 900,000, Philadelphia has the highest cancer death rate, for both blacks and whites and both the elderly and middle-aged.

Donna Cuthbert, with the Pottstown-based Alliance for a Clean Environment, said, “It’s time we take action and force the industry and NRC to address health, safety, and security problems they have so far refused to recognize.” According to the CRAC-2 report submitted to Congress in 1982 by the NRC, an accident or attack at Limerick could quickly cause as many as 74,000 deaths and 610,000 other cases of radiation poisoning, the highest of any U.S. nuclear plant. “With the population up 24% in Montgomery County and as much as 64% in Chester County from the 1970 census data used in the study, the results would be more devastating today. Families in and around Pottstown and Philadelphia deserve to know just what kind of threat is sitting right in their backyard.”

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*Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization with 160,000 members based in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org).*

*Alliance for a Clean Environment (ACE) is a non-profit organization based in the Greater Pottstown Area, working on protecting the rights of citizens against the powerful industries which poison our air, water, soil, and food, and consequently threaten our health. For more information, please visit [www.acereport.org](http://www.acereport.org).*

*The Radiation and Public Health Project is a nonprofit group consisting of scientific and health professionals. Members have published twenty medical journal articles and five books since 1994. For more information, please visit [www.radiation.org](http://www.radiation.org).*

*The Nuclear Reality Campaign was founded in 2004 as a national student-youth network to oppose both nuclear power and nuclear weapons. For more information, please visit [www.nrcwatch.org](http://www.nrcwatch.org).*