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## How the NRC Dropped the Ball on Davis-Besse (and what you can do about it)

Call, write, or email the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and tell them to stop putting industry concerns ahead of public safety concerns! The agency must provide better oversight of dangerous nuclear power plants and should step up and **shut down Davis-Besse**. In regards to the Davis-Besse situation alone:

- **NRC knew about the risks, but did not act.** NRC had specific knowledge of the type of problem that caused the leaks at Davis-Besse more than a year before they were actually discovered there in March, 2002. There was widespread knowledge of similar problems at a French reactor, and the Oconee reactor in South Carolina was found to have such problems in February 2001.
- **NRC risked public health and safety by striking a deal with Davis-Besse's owners.** As the problem of vessel nozzle cracking was further researched, Davis-Besse was considered an "at-risk" plant, vulnerable to such problems. Rather than force FirstEnergy to shut down Davis-Besse on December 31, 2001, as had been planned, NRC repeatedly compromised and the plant was allowed to run for six additional weeks, to February 16, 2002.
- **NRC apparently sees itself as accountable to no one.** NRC's own Inspector General released an "event inquiry" report on December 30, 2002, which not only criticized NRC's handling of the inspection and shutdown of Davis-Besse, but questioned NRC's priorities, finding that "NRC appears to have informally established an unreasonably high burden of requiring absolute proof of a safety problem, versus lack of reasonable assurance of maintaining public health and safety, before it will act to shut down a power plant." Rather than accepting the IG report as a warning sign to make urgent changes, the NRC Commissioners circled their wagons and responded with a cavalier brush-off, calling the IG report "Monday-morning quarterbacking."
- **A survey of NRC employees finds "safety culture" to be deficient.** The "2002 Survey of NRC's Safety Culture and Climate," conducted by an outside, independent firm, found that "many NRC employees perceive a compromise of the 'safety culture...'" and that only slightly more than half (53%) of employees feel that it is "safe to speak up in the NRC." Compared to the same survey performed in 1998, there was a "significant decrease" in the percentage of employees who felt that "NRC's commitment to public safety is apparent in what we do on a day-to-day basis." Perhaps most troubling, however, was that the report found "[c]oncern that NRC is becoming influenced by private industry and its power to regulate is diminishing." In light of the situation at Davis-Besse, these findings are even more distressing.
- **The reactor problems are hardly confined to Davis-Besse.** Even more than a year after the massive damage was discovered at Davis-Besse, the NRC had hardly contained the problem. Further evidence emerged that all similar reactors (of 103 reactors in the U.S., 69 are pressurized water reactors, or PWRs, like Davis-Besse) were very vulnerable, as a leak and acid deposits were discovered at the South Texas Project 1 reactor. Apparently confident that it was a sound reactor, the NRC had granted it a power uprate to produce at greater intensity, little more than a year prior to finding the leak.

**DO SOMETHING!** You can register your opinions on NRC oversight and the Davis-Besse debacle with **James Caldwell**, Regional Administrator at the NRC, through email at [opa@nrc.gov](mailto:opa@nrc.gov), phone at (630) 829-9658, or mail at James Caldwell, Regional Administrator, U.S. NRC, 801 Warrenville Road, Lisle, IL 60532-4351.