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Coalition Files Legal Challenge to Entergy's Proposed New Nuclear Plants

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Port Gibson, Miss.— The Claiborne County NAACP is leading a coalition of environmental, consumer, and human rights organizations that filed a legal challenge today to plans by Entergy Corp. to build one or more large nuclear reactors next to Entergy's Grand Gulf nuclear reactor in Port Gibson.

A.C. Garner, spokesman for the Claiborne County NAACP, said there is a lack of financial resources to fund adequate emergency services.

“Speaking as a person who served for 14 years as emergency manager of Claiborne County, I feel people would suffer if there was an accident or act of terrorism at the plant because our emergency planning is not up to par,” Garner said. “It is the responsibility of the fire department, law enforcement and emergency management to make sure these people are evacuated if necessary. It is questionable that this could be done with the present lack of resources.”

For the first few years that Grand Gulf operated, Claiborne County received all the property tax revenues from the nuclear power plant located between Vicksburg and Natchez on the Mississippi River. But Garner said the Mississippi Legislature then passed a bill initiated and encouraged by Entergy to take away most of the tax funds. Claiborne County now must share the tax revenues with 47 other counties in Mississippi.

“This is a predominantly African American county with about an 84 percent minority population, and 32 percent of the people living below the poverty line,” Garner said. “The legislature is predominantly white. Removing these tax revenues from Claiborne County is a clear case of racism. Without adequate funding, it causes a devastating hardship for the county to fund emergency planning necessary because of the nuclear plant.”

The Claiborne County NAACP, the Mississippi Chapter of Sierra Club, the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS), and Public Citizen filed a motion today in Washington, D.C. to intervene in what is called the Early Site Permit for the new nuclear power reactor(s) at Grand Gulf. Through a company called System Energy Resources, Inc., Entergy is seeking a permit which would allow the company to “bank” the site for 20 years, during which time it can choose a reactor type and apply for a combined construction and operating license.

“Grand Gulf is the only nuclear plant in the country where tax revenues have been taken from the county that accepts the risk of the facility,” said Rose Johnson, chair of the Mississippi Chapter of Sierra Club. “The county doesn't even have a hospital that is open 24 hours. And there is only one fire station in the entire county. The current

situation should send chills down the spines of anyone who lives within a hundred miles of Port Gibson. This is the worst example of environmental racism I have ever seen.”

Johnson said an accident or act of sabotage at this facility with its growing inventory of nuclear waste could contaminate the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. “It could wreak havoc on everyone downstream and downwind, including seafood industries that produce economic benefits each year totaling many millions of dollars,” she said.

Paul Gunter, director of the Reactor Watchdog Program for Washington, D.C.-based NIRS, said that inadequate planning and infrastructure for critical emergency planning services is particularly worrisome because of the terrorist threat.

“After 9-11, the FBI and Office of Homeland Security clearly warned that nuclear facilities are prime targets for international terrorism,” Gunter said. “It is critical to educate the public about the ever-increasing dangers and vulnerabilities of nuclear power. Clearly, expanding the number of nuclear power stations at Grand Gulf also increases the risks and consequences to public health and safety even beyond Claiborne County.”

Currently 2.4 million pounds of extremely hazardous nuclear waste is being stored on site because of the lack of a permanent repository for nuclear waste, with more being added every refueling cycle. The federal government’s proposal for a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev., has been strongly opposed by the State of Nevada as scientifically flawed. Despite concerns about the lack of a permanent disposal site for nuclear waste, the NRC has taken action to make it easier to license the siting, construction and operation of new nuclear reactors.

“The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which must approve licenses for new nuclear reactors, has streamlined the site permitting process to make it easier for corporations to get licenses for new nuclear reactors and harder for the public to challenge them,” said Michele Boyd, legislative representative at Public Citizen in Washington, D.C. “Entergy’s plans for new nuclear reactors will create more dangerous radioactive waste, and further threaten the health and lives of people who live, work, and attend school in Port Gibson.”

The Alliance for Affordable Energy based in New Orleans, La., and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network also intend to file for intervention in the permit proceedings before the Feb. 17 deadline.