



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, DC 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

No. 04-084

July 9, 2004

ATOMIC SAFETY AND LICENSING BOARD TO HOLD HEARING ON USE OF MIXED-OXIDE FUEL AT CATAWBA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board will convene a hearing July 14-15 at NRC Headquarters in Rockville, Md., on the proposed use of mixed-oxide (MOX) lead test assemblies by Duke Energy Corp. at its Catawba Nuclear Station.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) has been admitted as a party to the hearing on Duke Energy's application to amend its operating license for Catawba to allow use of four MOX assemblies. (MOX contains a mixture of plutonium and uranium oxides, with plutonium providing the primary fissile isotopes.) The Duke request is part of a joint U.S.-Russian Federation program to dispose of surplus plutonium from nuclear weapons by converting the material into MOX fuel for use in nuclear reactors.

At the hearing, the board will receive evidence on BREDL's non-security related contention challenging the adequacy of certain aspects of Duke's license amendment request. BREDL asserts that MOX fuel behaves differently than typical low-enriched uranium fuel, with implications for accident scenario analyses for the Catawba plant. Testimony will be presented, and witnesses may be cross-examined.

Members of the public may attend as observers, but participation will be limited to representatives of BREDL, Duke Energy and the NRC staff. The board heard public statements on Duke's request at a June 15 pre-hearing session held in Charlotte, N.C. The evidentiary hearing was originally scheduled to be held on that date as well, but was rescheduled at the request of BREDL.

The hearing will start at 1 p.m. on July 14 and reconvene at 9 a.m. on July 15. It will be held at the NRC's Two White Flint North Building, 11545 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Md. Visitors must present two pieces of identification (one with photo) and should allow ample time for processing through the building's security checkpoint. Visitors should indicate to the guards that they wish to attend the "Catawba hearing," and arrangements will be made to escort them to the hearing room.

###