

DAILY NEWS

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Indian Point nuclear power plant floats cheaper way to cool down, save fish

By Abby Luby

The owner of the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant is angling for another chance to save Hudson River fish.

The utility company Entergy has been under the gun since the state charged it violated water quality standards by flushing heated water into the river, killing a billion fish a year.

The Department of Environmental Conservation has mandated that Entergy install a new cooling system or shut down in 2015.

The plant would have to construct two large and expensive 17-story cooling towers at its site in Buchanan, 35 miles from New York City.

In the first of many DEC hearings this week to overturn its ruling, Entergy argued that a less costly "wedgewire" screen system would keep fish alive.

"We want the DEC to allow us to argue the merits of wedgewire over cooling towers," said Entergy spokesman Jim Steets. "Cooling towers would have very significant negative impacts."

Indian Point earns about \$1 million a day for Entergy. The mammoth cooling towers would cost about \$1.5 billion. The wedgewire system would only cost \$200 million.

Indian Point needs a valid water-use permit from the DEC in order to extend its operating license 20 years to 2035.

Supporting Entergy before Administrative Law Judge Maria Villa at a public hearing on Tuesday were several city groups, including One Hundred Black Men of New York City and ShareNY (Healthy Affordable Reliable Energy). Several voiced fears of rising electricity costs affecting the poor if the plant closed.

"We want clean, affordable power," said Gail Kearney of the Anti-Violence Coalition in Brooklyn.

Jerry Connolly of the Coalition of Labor for Energy and Boilermakers Local 5 said the cost of a new water cooling system might shut down Indian Point and lead to job losses.

"Unemployment in the trades is at 40% across the board in New York," he said.

Others argued that Hudson River fish are thriving and Indian Point doesn't need to replace their cooling system.

"The plant has been operating fine for 40 years," said John Murgida, a Manhattan engineer.

Indian Point sucks in 2.5 billion gallons of river water daily to cool its two reactors. Entergy has paid for studies that show minimal impact on Hudson River aquatic life.

Critics like Robert Kennedy Jr.'s Riverkeeper have said wedgewire screens would still trap small fish and wouldn't lessen thermal impact on the river.

Villa will hand off a recommendation to DEC Commissioner Peter Grannis.

There is no date set for Grannis' final decision.