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Best way to protect Hudson River debated at Indian Point hearing

By Art Cusano

CORTLANDT - Hundreds of area residents and Indian Point employees voiced mixed opinions Tuesday, July 20, at a public hearing at Colonial Terrace in Cortlandt regarding the state Department of Environmental Conservation's April denial of Entergy's proposed watercooling plan.

The DEC wants Entergy, the owner of Indian Point, to build cooling towers to process the water it uses and returns to the river while the company insists the use of wedgewire screens in the river is the best and most up-to-date technology to ensure the safety of the Hudson River's aquatic life, according to Entergy spokesman Jerry Nappi.

Buchanan Mayor Sean Murray, who is employed by Entergy, said village officials believe wedgewire is a superior technology to cooling towers.

Murray said while he received information from Entergy, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Riverkeeper, a nonprofit that advocates the ecological integrity of the Hudson River and its tributaries, he had not heard from the DEC.

"You're the ones making the decisions but you're not informing the elected officials in the community that's affected," Murray said.

Croton Mayor Leo Wiegman wanted to know why images of thermal plumes in the river caused by the plant are no longer available on public access sites where they were once available. He said that regularly updated data was important for the public to make educated decisions.

"Why can't the public have those pictures?" Wiegman said. "Why can't they see the current variations in size, depth and temperature of the nuclear plant's thermal plume?"

Peekskill Mayor Mary Foster said she wanted to see more detailed data from the DEC on emissions from cooling towers and what they would look like, as well as data on thermal plumes and their effects. She said she feared the proposed towers may adversely affect the quality of life the city has been working hard to improve.

"We have spent four decades trying to move away from an industrial look on our riverfront and I do not want that look back," Foster said.

Asbestos Workers Local 91 spokesman Mike Tracey, whose members work at the plant, said that the DEC could end up

harming the very environment it is hoping to protect if the plant is shut down, because fossil fuels would be used to replace nuclear energy, which he said causes more pollution.

"The people I serve, and their families, are far more important than fish eggs and larvae," Tracey said. "Indian Point is responsible for hundreds of well-paying union jobs and nearly three quarters of a billion dollars in economic impact for our region."

Riverkeeper spokesman Phillip Musegaas said Entergy was exaggerating the size and look of the cooling towers and said other designs do exist.

"I think they're using the largest, most visually impacting towers in their proposal simply to make them [the towers] look as bad as possible," Musegaas said.

Entergy would have to spend over \$1 billion to build two cooling towers for its two operating plants, according to the company, which claims each cooling tower would be 170 feet high and occupy a footprint comparable to the size of Yankee Stadium.

Opponents said the estimate is exaggerated.

The company said the construction of the towers would require years of rock blasting to prepare for installation, and once installed, the towers would emit about 100 tons of particulate matter into the air.

Entergy officials want to install a wedgewire screen array, which would be placed under the surface of the river in an area Entergy already has cordoned off for plant safety reasons. The cost of the array would total about \$100 million, Entergy said.

The DEC ruled in April that the plant harms the river habitat and that it must install a closed-cycle cooling process that uses less water by recycling it or have their water-use permit revoked. Without the DEC permit, Indian Point cannot renew its operating license and would have to close when their current license expires.

The matter was due to go before an administrative law judge July 21.