



Mississippi River running through Minneapolis, Minn., drinking water for 20 million downstream was contaminated by Monticello reactor leak.

NRC Apologizes, *continued from p.1*

on tritium leak: Now says low concentrations got into Mississippi River.”

Xcel Energy’s 2023 “Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report” says on page two, “Tritium was detected in newly developed MW-33A [monitoring well-33A] and MW-37A which resulted in MNGP [Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant] reporting an abnormal discharge to the Mississippi River.”

What Koenick meant by “miscommunication” were claims repeatedly made to the press that no tritium had been found by Xcel’s testing of the river. On March 18, 2023, NRC spokesperson Victoria Mitylting even told the press, “There is no pathway for the tritium to get into drinking water.” As recently as May 7, 2024, NRC presenters at an NRC-sponsored public hearing, also held in Monticello, said on the record that Xcel had found “no detectable levels” of tritium in the Mississippi. Xcel Energy, which owns the reactor, made many similar misstatements. A company website posting still online says, “We test the river regularly for tritium and have not found any, indicating that if it is present, it is at such low levels, and is dispersing so quickly, that it cannot be detected by highly sensitive instruments.” This directly contradicts well test results that Xcel submitted to the NRC on December 18 proving they found detectable tritium levels in the Mississippi River at several points over the summer of 2023. Xcel has applied for a second operating license extension which, if granted, would allow the Monticello reactor to run until the age of 80.

Monticello Reactor Threatens Health
continued from p. 1

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, before and just after the Monticello reactor started up, the two-county death rate was 6 to 7% below that of other Minnesota counties — for cancers, and for all causes combined. This pattern is expected in an area with low rates of people who lack health insurance, who are disabled, or who live in poverty.

By the late 1970s, the two-county death rate exceeded the state rate for all causes, and has remained high ever since. If the local rate had remained 6-7% below the state, over 4,000 fewer deaths would have occurred. Cancer death rates are also high; in the two most recent years (2022 and 2023), the local rate was 9% and 20% above the state, respectively.

Many factors can account for an elevated risk of death. But one clue that Monticello releases may have been one factor is cancer mortality among children – who are much more likely to be harmed by a dose of radiation than are adults. Prior to the early 1990s, local child cancer mortality was 37% below the state, but has been 14% above ever since.

The push to keep the Monticello reactor running does little as a solution for future energy needs, as it only accounts for 9% of Minnesota’s electricity. However, safe and renewable sources accounted for 31% of the state’s electricity in 2022, most of it wind power, a number that is rising each year.

Unlike nuclear power, the wind and sun pose no cancer risk, and will last forever. The application to keep Monticello open should be denied, and the reactor should close in 2030, the end of its current license period. — **Joseph J. Mangano, MPH MBA, is an epidemiologist and Executive Director of the Radiation and Public Health Project.**

Summer 2024

Updates on Xcel Energy’s Monticello Nuclear Reactor:

Monticello Draft EIS Ignores Climate Change, Federal Law

Reactor operations expert Paul Gunter at Beyond Nuclear, reports in written comments to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) that its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding Xcel Energy’s license renewal application for its Monticello, Minn. reactor should be withdrawn because it ignores the likely impact of climate change on nuclear accident risks, particularly the chances of Mississippi River flooding. Ignoring climate issues in the DEIS, Gunter says, violates requirements of the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

NEPA mandates that federal agencies take a “hard look” at environmental impacts for all major federal actions, but the NRC’s DEIS disregards climate risks saying they “are outside the scope of the NRC staff’s ... environmental review.”

Environmental Group Issues Demands on Monticello License Extension Process

In June, the Rainbow Warrior Collective filed a 16-page complaint to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Minnesota state regulatory agencies, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Collective calls for the withdrawal of the NRC’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Xcel Energy’s Monticello reactor license extension, and for an investigation into the 829,000 gallon leak of cooling water. Authored by Kelsey Beaumaster, Vanessa Friedhoff, and John Miller, the comprehensive review of the NRC’s DEIS concludes with these specific demands:

[1] Given the extensive scope of information that needs to be considered and the substantial public interest, we urge the NRC to re-establish and extend the public comment period for the DEIS.

[2] Mandate the creation and enforcement of a legally binding agreement between Xcel and all relevant regulatory bodies to address past, present, and future contamination of drinking water, including a thor-

However, binding NRC regulations now require that, “If new information about changing environmental conditions (such as rising sea levels or potential flooding...) becomes available, the NRC will evaluate the new information.”

Such new information was presented on April 2, 2024, by the Government Accounting Office, an investigative arm of Congress, in its report, “Nuclear Power Plants: NRC Should Take Action to Fully Consider the Potential Impacts of Climate Change.” The report singles out Monticello in an appendix, finding that as the unit is located in the flood plain of the Mississippi River, the reactor’s “Exposure for Selected Natural Hazards” includes “Flood Hazard” which it rates as “High.”

ough assessment and remediation plan, transparent public reporting, funding for significant research, and independent oversight, with all costs borne by the polluter or the entity applying for a license extension.

[3] Investigate the allegations regarding the evaporation of tritiated water and disclose all relevant dose calculations and health risk assessments. Require funding of independent research to prove such operations are “as safe” as alleged by Xcel Energy.

[4] Ensure accountability for the manipulation of scientific data, silencing of public concerns, and the cover-up of environmental incidents, all of which constitute a deliberate deception of the public.

[5] Consider appointing a Special Prosecutor to handle the investigation into the tritium leak and nuclear moratorium matters, involving the public utilities commission. This ensures transparency and impartiality, aligning with legal protocols in Minnesota. — **For the full report contact nukewatch1@lakeland.ws.**

NRC Froze Data Gathering Same Day Tritium Tests Near Mississippi River Topped Drinking Water Limits

To prepare its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding Xcel Energy’s license extension application for its Monticello reactor, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission had to establish a formal information-gathering period. The data collection time-frame officially ended on August 18, 2023.

According to Xcel Energy and NRC documents reviewed by Nukewatch, the NRC seems to have coincidentally picked for its end date the very day that radioactive tritium contamination in a groundwater test well near the Mississippi River exceeded the federal EPA safe drinking water limit.

In Xcel’s December 18, 2023 response to an NRC information request on its relicense application, Xcel submitted a table documenting the results of monitoring well tests between November 21, 2022 and August 18, 2023. Xcel’s table notes that the level of tritium in monitoring well (MW)-37A between July 27, 2023 and August 18, 2023 grew five-fold until, on August 18, it exceeded the EPA safe drinking water limit of 20,000 pico-curies-per-liter (pCi/L).

The NRC is currently considering Xcel’s application for a second 20-year license extension which, if granted, would allow the Monticello reactor in Minn., to run until 2050, when it would be 80 years old.

The NRC’s data collection cut-off date omits the critical time-frame immediately after August 18, when tritium levels near the Mississippi River were still increasing.

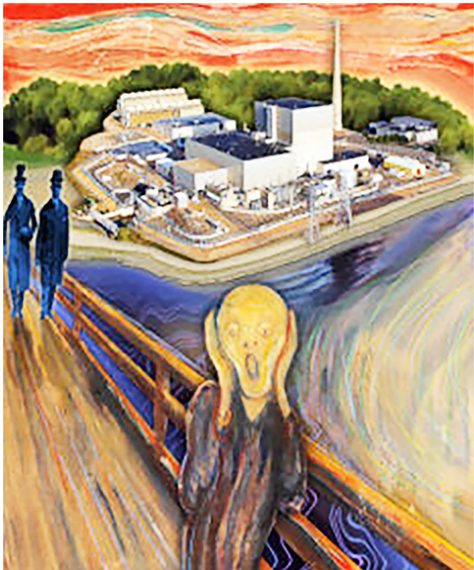
Similarly, Xcel’s “2023 Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report” fails to provide precise data on monitoring well test results following August 18, 2023, noting only in general terms that tests done after that date found no unsafe levels of contamination. “The NRC should demand that Xcel provide well test results from August 18, 2023, through December 31, 2023, and should then enter these into the Federal Register for public consideration,” said Nukewatch’s

Lindsay Potter, who discovered the coincidence. “The DEIS and license renewal process is incomplete without this information and should not move forward without it,” she said.

The reactor caused a leak to onsite groundwater of some 829,000 gallons of tritium-contaminated cooling water beginning in November 2022. In the same reply to the NRC December 18, 2023, Xcel reported that it had doubled its estimated volume of tritium-contaminated cooling water that had leaked to 829,000 gallons, not 400,000 gallons as it first reported.

The NRC acknowledges in its DEIS: “From available sampling data ... tritium activity in wells MW-29A and MW-37A, which are near the river, were above the 20,000 pCi/L drinking water standard and trending in an upward direction as of August 2023.”

Tritium is a radioactive form of hydrogen — impossible to remove from water — which crosses the placenta and can cause cancer if ingested or inhaled.



The classic *Scream*, by Edvard Munch, visits the Monticello nuclear reactor.

— **By Nukewatch Staff**

Nukewatch Quarterly - 5