

...s, from left, Arlo Staber, 13; Skye Stout, 8; Miranda Derr, 8; and Destiny Stout, 11, ride the swings at a play-ground on East Maple Street in Tresckow Sunday. The weekend weather - with highs topping 60 degrees on Saturday - was perfect for outdoor activities. Temperatures dropped Sunday night and Monday started off windy and wet, but the kids were back in school.

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# Group challenges N-plant license renewal

The leader of a citizen watchdog group that formed after the 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg is challenging the PPL's application to renew its operating license for the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station.

PPL in September applied for a license renewal for the plant with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The utility is seeking to add 20 years to the original 40-year permit for the power station's two reactors.

The license for the Unit 1 reactor expires in 2022 and the Unit 2 reactor license

expires in 2024.

Eric Epstein, chairman of TMI Alert, filed on Tuesday a hearing request with the federal agency on PPL's application.

In the request, Epstein lists a series of reasons why he's opposed to a license renewal.

They include financial, environmental and public safety issues, according to the filing.

Epstein, in his request, notes that a license renewal is premature considering the still-young status of the plant near Berwick and Shickshinny.

A major focus of the relicensing process is an examination of how well the utility has dealt with aging plant components.

The renewal application also does take into account increased electricity rates, property assessments and water usage.

The Susquehanna plant withdraws water from the Susquehanna River for cooling purposes. And its twin cooling towers dominate the skyline in the Wapwallopen area of Conyngham Township, Luzerne County.

Epstein, in speaking to a Wilkes-Barre newspaper, said the environmental concerns include the plant's storage of

radioactive wastes near the river.

And he said PPL needs approval from the Susquehanna River Basin Commission to consume use more water before it can seek a license renewal.

"They jumped the gun," Epstein said of PPL.

"You have a situation where the surrounding community is going to experience increased electric rates, increased property assessments and increased water usage. It's not fair for local communities to endure the risks of hosting a [nuclear power] plant and then they're faced with these burdens."

Joe Scopelliti, a PPL spokesman, said the generating station pays its fair share of taxes as set by local governing bodies and Luzerne County. Scopelliti said he wasn't aware of any requirement to seek the SRBC's approval before going to the NRC.

He acknowledged the right of citizens and groups to intercede in the license renewal process, noting that,

"It's part of the process."

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said the agency's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board will review Epstein's request. The three-person panel will determine if Epstein has standing and if his appeal meets the criteria for a hearing.

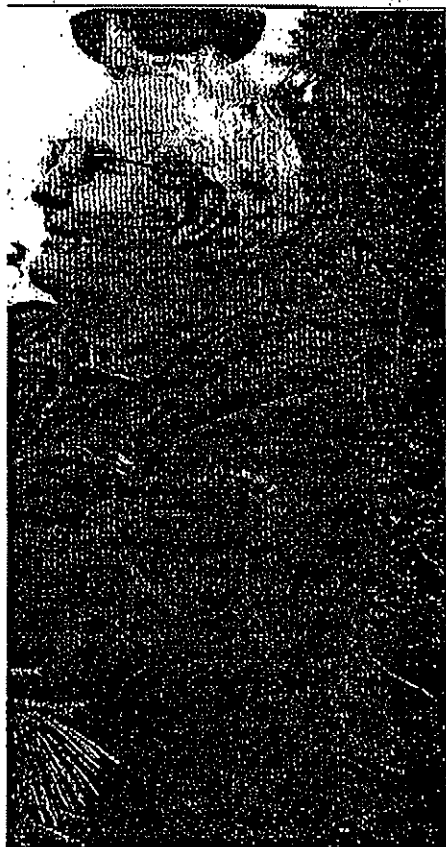
The process, Sheehan said, can take several months.

"The two primary areas we look at are the environmental impacts and the way they manage the aging effects of key safety systems, structures and components," Sheehan said.

Requests for hearings are infrequent. There are 103 reactors in the United States and 47 have been approved for license extensions while only seven faces a hearing request.

Both the requestor and utility can appeal any decision the NRC renders, Sheehan said.

For his part, Epstein said he's ready to go to court regardless of the outcome of his hearing request.



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