

Taxpayers shouldn't have to back N-power

AS I SEE IT ERIC J. EPSTEIN

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PPL has declared that part of its strategy to cure global warming is to add another nuclear generating station. While PPL's nuclear stations have less of a carbon "footprint" than their coal-generating siblings, the company has failed to acknowledge the financial, radioactive and aquatic "footprints" associated with adding on to the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station.

According to PPL, a new nuclear reactor requires a federal subsidy of \$4.5 billion or 80 percent of the projected cost of the project. This "nuclear loan" is guaranteed by the U.S. Treasury -- i.e., taxpayers. The real cost, based on overruns in Florida and Texas, is actually \$10 billion. Which begs the obvious question: Why aren't the shareholders of one of the "best managed" and "most profitable utilities" (Forbes magazine, December 2007) assuming the risk for a multibillion-dollar slam dunk?

It's back to the future. PPL's operating nuclear plants were projected to cost ratepayers \$2.1 billion, but overruns resulted in a \$4.1 billion price tag. These are the same folks who are currently collecting \$2.86 in nuclear taxes. Check out the "Competitive Transition Costs" portion of your electric bill. It gets worse for senior citizens and those living on fixed incomes. PPL will be treating its loyal customer base to a 35 percent increase on Jan. 1, 2010.

What's on deck? PPL is currently requesting permission to store an additional 1,200 tons of high-level nuclear waste alongside the Susquehanna River over a 20-year period. PPL's nuclear generation station currently produces 60 metric tons of spent fuel each year.

This "radioactive footprint" will last thousands of years. Susquehanna is one of 21 nuclear power plants where used reactor fuel pools have reached capacity. In other words, PPL already has 1,440 tons high-level nuclear garbage looking for a home. And as The Patriot-News pointed out, ("Disposal of nuclear waste nears crisis stage," June 9, there is no storage bin for nuclear waste. PPL began storing low-level radioactive waste on site as of July 1, when Barnwell, S.C., closed its facility to states outside of the Atlantic Compact.

Pennsylvania belongs to the Appalachian Compact. Neither PPL, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission nor the state Department of Environmental Protection has been able to "incent" a single Pennsylvania community to bed down with a 500-year "low-level" radioactive "footprint."

Communities and ecosystems that depend on limited water resources are also adversely affected by the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station, which draws 58 to 63.5 million gallons of water per day, and returns reduced amounts of back wash at elevated temperatures. Last fall, 53 counties were placed on "drought watch," including Luzerne County where the station is moored. Yet PPL was exempted from water conservation efforts.

Why should taxpayers subsidize PPL's "radioactive footprint?" PPL's solution to global warming is little more than corporate socialism wrapped in a green bow.
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