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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*** 29 May 2024

***Contact:*** John LaForge, 715-491-3813, <nukewatch1@lakeland.ws>; Kelly Lundeen, 715-933-1941, kellylundeen14@gmail.com>

**U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission apologizes for “miscommunication” —**

**Now says radioactive tritium from Monticello reactor did leak to the Mississippi River**

A representative of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has apologized for public reassurances from its staff that a major leak of radioactive tritium from Xcel Energy’s Monticello nuclear reactor had not reached the Mississippi River, drinking water source for 20 million people including the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area.

In opening remarks to the NRC-sponsored public hearing at the Monticello Community Center Wednesday, May 15, 2024, NRC Senior Environmental Project Manager Stephen S. Koenick[1], reversed the NRC staff’s often-repeated assurances that leaked tritium from the 53-year-old Monticello reactor had not been detected in the Mississippi River.

Koenick said, “I would like to take a moment to address and clarify some miscommunication regarding the presence of detectable tritium in the Mississippi River. I know we … reported there were no indication[s] of [a] tritium leak [which] made it to the Mississippi. However, … in our Draft Environmental Impact Statement, we … conclude there were some very low concentrations of tritium in the Mississippi River.”[2] Koenick went on to say, “So we apologize for this miscommunication.”

The tritium contamination of the Mississippi is confirmed in Xcel Energy’s May 14, 2024 “Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report,” submitted to the NRC, which says on page 2, "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."[3]

The NRC’s apology regarded several miscommunications made to the press assuring that no detectable tritium had been found by Xcel’s testing of the Mississippi River. On March 18, 2023, NRC spokesperson Victoria Mitlyng told the press that, “There is no pathway for the tritium to get into drinking water.”[4] The NRC’s May 15 public reversal also contradicts Mitlyng’s email message, sent to Nukewatch the evening of the May 15, 2024 public hearing, in which Mitlyng wrote: “As far as the Mississippi River, samples taken from the river so far have not shown increased tritium concentrations.”[5] As recently as May 7, 2024, NRC presenters at an NRC-sponsored public hearing, also held in Monticello’s Community Center, stated on the record that Xcel had found "no detectable levels" of radioactive tritium in the Mississippi River.

Xcel Energy stated in a November 18, 2023 company website posting, “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.”[6]

However, the company had previously concluded otherwise. The firm’s July 27, 2023 annual radioactive effluent release report states, “As a result of the continued migration of the Tritium Plume following the abnormal release to the site environs in 2022, MNGP concluded that Tritium had the potential to reach the river. This determination was made after H-3 [tritium] was detected in Monitoring Wells 33A & 37A on July 27, 2023.”[7] Wells 33A and 37A are the two closest to the river.

Xcel has applied for a second operating license extension which, if granted, would allow the Monticello reactor to run until the age of 80. Public comments on the NRC’s environmental impact statement for the application are being accepted until June 10. ###

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**Notes for verification only**

[1] Stephen S. Koenick, Chief of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s Environmental Project Management Branch 1, Division of Rulemaking, Environmental, and Financial Support, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards. <stephen.koenick@nrc.gov>

[2] From transcript of tape recording, Nuclear Regulatory Commission public meeting, Monticello Community Center, Monticello, MN, Wednesday, May 15, 2024.

[3] Xcel, Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant, Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report, May 14, 2024, Page 2. [Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant - 2023 Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report (nrc.gov)](https://adams.nrc.gov/wba/view)

[4] Associated Press, “Regulators: Nuclear plant leak didn't require public notice”, by Michael Phillis and Amancia Biraben, March 18, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/xcel-energy-nuclear-leak-tritium-6e522afbb12ad26925c40d833853088d>

[5] Victoria Mitlyng, <Viktoria.Mitlyng@nrc.go>, email to Nukewatch, Wednesday, May 15, 2024

**[6] Xcel website - Monticello Groundwater: Progress on the recovery and treatment of tritium in the groundwater at the Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant, as of Nov. 18, 2023,** <https://mn.my.xcelenergy.com/s/outage-safety/public-safety/monticello-groundwater>

[7] “2023 Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report” for Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant, for the period covering January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023, p. 9. <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2413/ML24135A191.pdf>