

Newspaper Article
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Article written by the Community Decommissioning Advisory Committee

When a nuclear plant goes away, does it really go away?

In 1997, Connecticut Yankee, the nuclear power plant in Haddam, closed. Built in the 1960's, it had become too expensive to operate and its owners, with governmental approval, decided to cease operation and to close the facility. But closing a nuclear power plant isn't like shutting a retail store. In 1997, the owners of Connecticut Yankee announced that decommissioning the plant would take up to seven years.

At \$427 million, the decommissioning of CY will be one of the most expensive projects in Middlesex County history. Just as the plant was built slowly and carefully, with great emphasis on worker and community safety, decommissioning will involve special worker training and elaborate safeguards.

That's where CDAC comes in. CDAC - the Community Decommissioning Advisory Committee - was formed in 1997 to give residents of surrounding towns information on the decommissioning - and to provide CY management input on community concerns.

CDAC is interested in the long-term use of the CY property - 525 almost pristine acres on the eastern bank of the Connecticut River. Just as important is the long-term storage of nuclear fuel on the 30-acres now occupied by CY buildings, parking and work areas. Under federal law the spent fuel must stay on-site until a permanent depository is established- something that may not happen for years. How will that fuel be stored? How safe is it? When can it be moved?

Just as important to CDAC are transportation issues. As CY is dismantled, huge sections of the plant - machinery and pieces of machinery - will be moved by truck or barge to disposal sites. What is the best way to do that? What will be the effect of on nearby roads and communities - or on Connecticut River boaters, fisherman and swimmers?

Many questions. Many issues - and the place to discuss them is at the monthly meetings of CDAC. You're invited to attend these monthly meeting - not just to hear about the progress of decommissioning, but to voice your own concerns and raise your own questions. If you have questions or want to provide input to a CDAC member, their names are listed below.

Members of CDAC from your community:

Chester: TBA

East Hampton: AlanBergren

Haddam: TBA

Haddam Neck: Robert Myers

Middletown: KarolHervey

Portland: EdwardKalinowski

East Haddam: Logan Clarke

Organizations represented:

Citizens Awareness Network: RosemaryBasilakis

Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Co.: AnthonyNericcio

League of Women Voters: JoyceRossiter

Middlesex Country Chamber of Commerce: Jim Johnson

Middlesex Hospital: CliffordAshton

State of Connecticut: AnthonyScalora

Office of SamGejdenson: GeorgeGager

CDAC Chairman: HughCurley

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Russ Mellor talks about CY decommissioning

The decommissioning of Connecticut Yankee, one of the biggest projects in Middlesex County history, is under the supervision of CY vice president Russ Mellor. He has been through this kind of project before, as part of the management team that decommissioned Yankee Row Atomic power plant in Rowe, MA. That project is essentially complete, with the exception of moving used nuclear fuel off site, Mellor said, and Yankee Rowe is in the process of doing a final survey.

"They've done the job they set out to do," Mellor said. Like CY, Yankee Rowe occupied a large tract of land adjacent to a river- about 2,000 acres, although the plant itself occupied only about 30. CY uses about 30 acres of its 525-acre site and Mellor sees eventual re-use of the site as critical.

"This is a wonderful piece of property," Mellor said, "either for further industrial use or as a power-generating facility on

the spot now occupied by the plant - or as a sanctuary." With frontage on both the Connecticut River and Salmon River, CY is working closely with members of the Salmon River Watershed Alliance to be sure that the buffer areas of the CY property are left as pristine as possible.

Because the CY property may have further use as a power-generating facility, some portions of the plant may be left intact until a final decision on re-powering is made by appropriate authorities. At the same time, CY has already sold some equipment - turbine rotors - to another power company. When all the planned dismantling is done - in 2004, according to plans - only the nuclear fuel will be left on-site. That material is under the province of the Department of Energy and its eventual disposition is the subject of much debate. CY currently has a court case pending against the DOE for damages resulting from DOE's failure to remove CY's fuel. There are about 125 CY employees and 340 contract personnel working on-site now. Many of the contractors have been engaged, not in the decommissioning itself but in preparations for it. That work included removal of asbestos and dismantling of walls and even buildings to allow work crews further access to the site, especially for the removal of major items such as steam generators.

Transportation of the four 240-ton generators, originally planned for mid-spring, will be pushed back as the Bechtel Power Corporation has been engaged to take over the decommissioning process.

"Now that the preparations are ending," Mellor said, "we'll have to transition the site over to Bechtel. That transition work is being planned now by our staff."

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Interviews With Members

Rosemary Bassilakis

A Watchdog's Role is a Mission

Rosemary Bassilakis of Haddam, an alternate to CDAC, didn't become a nuclear watchdog on purpose. It was as much an accident of geography as anything.

"When we bought our house in 1989," she said, "we didn't even know there was a nuclear power plant about a mile from the house." But when friends who lived in Charlemon, Mass. became interested in and concerned about the Yankee Rowe atomic power plant in their community, she found the same issues a mile away.

"It started off wondering about public health issues," she said. "I asked if there was a birth defect registry - and found that there was no one monitoring health issues surrounding nuclear power plants." Existing studies, she feels, have been too broad. "They rarely focus on people downwind from reactors, the ones most effected by routine releases of radionuclides." Additionally, she said, the low population densities around reactors makes it difficult to prove statistically significant health problems.

She began to research problems with CY and to work with other groups to learn more about nuclear issues and the nuclear industry. Eventually, she said, the disparate volunteers formed an organization - the Citizens Awareness Network - CAN - to monitor and speak about nuclear issues.

"First chartered in Massachusetts," she said, "the Connecticut chapter was formed four years ago." New York, Maine and Vermont also have chapters. Bassilakis is listed as "CT Research Director" but the title is almost honorary. "None of us gets paid," she said. "We get some funding from foundations, from tag sales, and individual CAN supporters. Because we are volunteers, donations go a long way."

Although underfunded, CAN is committed to involvement - and to the big picture, she said. "Nuclear pollution began long before the first power plant went on-line, with the mining and processing of uranium. It will continue long after local reactors are shut down and carted away with contamination on the reactor site itself and radioactive fuel rods which will be dangerous for 250,000 years."

CAN intends to draw attention to this waste problem through a Caravan of Conscience, she said. As CT Yankee begins to transport material off-site, CAN will travel along the coast to its destination, a nuclear waste depository in Barnwell, SC. They will hold press conferences to let residents and officials on the route to know the quality and destination of the material being moved through their communities.

"It's not just a local issue," she said. "You do not 'cleanup' radioactive contamination. You move it to another location where it will remain radioactive for thousands of years. Reactor communities and nuclear waste dump communities must work together to change our nation's policies on radioactive waste."

Ed Kalinowski

Watching out for His Community

Ed Kalinowski's association with Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Plant goes back years - and when he talks about the place, it's with a lot of respect and understanding. "They've been a good neighbor," he said. "When they first began holding safety drills I was a police officer and I worked closely with them."

Later, as director of Civil Defense for Portland, he worked closely with CY on emergency planning projects. He credits CY with helping to fund disaster training not just for Portland but other communities and with funding portion of the emergency response infrastructure that communities are using every day.

Now, as First Selectman, he has a different set of issues, and it's those issues that led to him serving on CDAC; he was just named vice-chairman. As he watches the plant go through the decommissioning process, he says, the first issue is

that it be done safely, that the kinds of procedures and the attention to detail he once saw employed continue to be a part of the process. At the same time, he is aware of new issues - the transport of material from the site itself - and the route it may take through his community. "And there are personnel issues as well," he said. "A lot of CY people lived in our community - many still do. And even though NU is moving some of them to different sites, it may still have an impact on us."

But it's the old issues that still hold a special interest for him. As a police officer and as CD director, he has toured the plant and taken part in the drills. He feels strongly about the intensity and seriousness of the training he took and that he knows members of the decommissioning team have gone through. He remembers much of what he's learned but thinks there is more than he can learn - and should be abreast of. "As First Selectman, I'm essentially CEO of this community," he said. "If something goes wrong at CY, or if something happens there that may affect Portland, the first person anyone will call is going to be me. I want to know what's going on."