

**News from Beyond Nuclear  
For Immediate Release**

**Contact:**

Michael J. Keegan, Don't Waste Michigan, (734) 770-1441, [mkeeganj@comcast.net](mailto:mkeeganj@comcast.net)

Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, (240) 462-3216, [kevin@beyondnuclear.org](mailto:kevin@beyondnuclear.org)

## **Environmental Coalition Legally Intervenes Against Palisades Atomic Reactor Restart**

### ***“Zombie” Nuke, and “Small” Modular Reactor New Builds, Would Compound Radioactive Risks***

**Covert, Michigan and Washington, D.C., December 6, 2023**—A coalition of environmental groups, including Beyond Nuclear, Don't Waste Michigan, and Michigan Safe Energy Future, has submitted **a petition to intervene, and request for hearing**, to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), opposing the unprecedented scheme to restart the permanently closed, more than half-century old Palisades atomic reactor.

The **petition and request** raised four contentions, namely: (1) a mere paperwork reshuffle, via an NRC exemption to regulations, is unacceptable to permit reactor restart, given the previous owner Entergy's June 2022 termination of the operating license, as well as the high risks to safety, security, health, and the environment; (2) Holtec has inappropriately and perhaps even illegally expended Decommissioning Trust Fund money, to the tune of many tens of millions of dollars, on the restart scheme and other unapproved non-decommissioning expenses, putting the future radiological cleanup of the contaminated site in serious jeopardy; (3) the license transfer from previous owner Entergy to Holtec is illegitimate and should be nullified, given Holtec's bait and switch trick, from supposed decommissioning-only, to the reactor restart scheme; (4) Holtec's attempt to do an end run around National Environmental Policy Act requirements through a so-called categorical exclusion should be rejected by NRC, especially considering the extreme risks to the environment of the restart scheme.

Arnie Gundersen, chief engineer of Fairewinds, prepared **an expert declaration** on behalf of the environmental coalition, detailing the severe safety risks and exorbitant costs associated with the unprecedented reactor restart scheme. Gundersen's expert declaration concluded, in part, that "...the degraded condition of every aspect of this nuclear power plant, the lack of a long-term experienced, skilled staff, and the non-existent QA [Quality Assurance] and management oversight programs flunk every atomic power failsafe feature that are hallmarks of our country's nuclear safety and licensing process and programs."

Not only did Palisades have the worst neutron-embrittled reactor pressure vessel in the country when it closed for good on May 20, 2022, it had several additional major safety concerns: steam generators and the reactor vessel closure head, all in need of replacement for two decades; Control Rod Drive Mechanism seal leaks that have plagued Palisades since 1972; and now safety-significant systems, structures, and components, such as the turbine-generator, steam generators, pumps, and valves, that have very likely gone unmaintained for a year and a half, and counting, leading to dangerous degradation. (Continued on next page.)

Mark Z. Jacobson, environmental engineer and Stanford University professor, also prepared **an expert declaration** on the renewable, efficiency, and storage electricity alternatives to nuclear power in the contexts of supply reliability and climate mitigation.

Kevin Kamps, radioactive waste specialist at Beyond Nuclear, also prepared **an expert declaration**, dissecting the nearly \$4.5 billion, and counting, of federal and state bailouts Holtec is seeking for the reactor restart scheme, as well as the \$7.4 billion in additional U.S. Department of Energy loan guarantees associated with its SMR new build plans.

“Holtec’s reckless nuclear plans at Palisades represent an existential risk to the Great Lakes on par with Enbridge’s oil pipeline shenanigans at the Straits of Mackinac,” said Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear. “Incredibly enough, the public is being forced to pay for this high-risk game of radioactive Russian roulette on the Lake Michigan shoreline, to the tune of nearly \$12 billion and counting,” Kamps added.

"The opportunity costs are astronomical," said Michael Keegan, co-chair of Don't Waste Michigan. "Substantially greater quantities of clean, safe, secure renewable energy coupled with efficiency and storage should be purchased far cheaper than spending an absurd \$16 million for each of 280 restored jobs at the zombie reactor," Keegan added.

“The Palisades reactor restart would resume generating 20 metric tons of highly radioactive irradiated nuclear fuel annually for decades to come. The proposed SMRs would generate two to 30 times the amount of high-level radioactive waste, per unit of electricity produced, as do current reactors,” said Bette Pierman of Michigan Safe Energy Future-Shoreline Chapter. “Holtec’s high-risk plan to barge high-level radioactive waste on Lake Michigan from Palisades to Muskegon could prove catastrophic if a single container sinks, whether due to accident or attack,” Pierman added.

“A year after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear catastrophe began, the Japanese Parliament published an independent root cause investigation report, unique in its history. The root cause, it concluded, was collusion between the company, the regulatory agency, and government officials, which left the nuclear power plant catastrophically vulnerable to the natural disasters that struck on March 11, 2011,” said Kamps. “Such collusion exists in spades at Palisades, and it wouldn’t necessarily take a natural disaster to unleash catastrophe. The breakdown phase risks at the zombie reactor, co-located with the break-in phase risks at the SMR new builds, could lead to domino-effect multiple reactor meltdowns at Palisades,” Kamps added.

Yesterday’s legal filing deadline fell on the same day that Holtec served up another bait and switch with an announcement to build yet to be design-certified SMR-300s instead of previously announced SMR-160s. The newly proposed Small Modular Reactors, of 300 Megawatts-electric each, would supposedly be built by 2030.

Terry Lodge of Toledo, Ohio, and Wally Taylor of Cedar Rapids, serve as the environmental coalition’s legal counsel. To establish legal standing, the intervention was made on behalf of members and supporters of the environmental groups, most of whom live within two miles or less of the Palisades nuclear power plant.

