

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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Georgia Nuclear Plant Sinking, Critics Charge Legal Action Filed May 11

Today the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League announced that part of a nuclear power plant under construction in Waynesboro, Georgia, is sinking. In a legal action filed Monday, the group called on regulators to revoke the plant's license for false statements made by its owners, Southern Nuclear Operating Company.

On May 11, BREDL filed a nineteen-page legal petition requesting a hearing before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board on a License Amendment for Plant Vogtle's Unit 3. The petition is supported by detailed, specific expert opinion. Under rules of procedure, Southern Company has 25 days to respond.

"Vogtle has finally admitted that the sheer weight of the nuclear island building is causing it to sink into the red Georgia clay," said Arnold Gundersen, an independent nuclear power plant engineer who provided analysis of the structural problems at Vogtle's Unit 3. He added, "It is figuratively and literally sinking under its own weight. Islands are not supposed to sink."

Charles Utley, BREDL's Augusta Office chief, said that questionable actions by the company had brought it to this point. Utley said, "Both the seismic gap and the information gap have the capability of causing catastrophic destruction. Therefore, it

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should not be allowed to operate.”

The legal action is the latest in a series of such challenges to Plant Vogtle. Louis Zeller, BREDL’s Executive Director and *pro se* legal representative in the case, said that the discovery of materially false statements had forced his hand. Zeller said, “The cake is baked. Using icing to cover the baker’s errors is unacceptable. Vogtle officials attempts to excuse shoddy workmanship cannot be allowed to obscure the facts.”

In February Southern Company requested a license amendment from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, seeking to reduce safety margins by narrowing what it called the “seismic gap” between Vogtle’s Unit 3 nuclear island and adjacent concrete structures. The company’s February 7 request asked the NRC for permission “to depart from Updated Final Safety Analysis Report...information.”

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a grassroots organization with projects in six states. Its local chapter Concerned Citizens of Shell Bluff supported the legal action with necessary affidavits if support.

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The May 11 legal petition and supporting expert analysis are posted online at <http://www.bredl.org/>