



## ISSUE Commentary

# This is just STUPID!

NRC to consider climate change-related risks to nuclear power plants

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single out  
the nuclear  
industry on  
this one.



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It was only a matter of time before "Climate Change" was used as a reason to shut down nuclear plants. Here's the story. . .

The [American Nuclear Society](#) (ANS) recently reported a climate change-related "risk issue" (my emphasis) in its April 23, 2024, SmartBrief membership publication. They linked to an article in the Yale Environment360, "Can Aging U.S. Nuclear Power Plants Withstand More Extreme Weather?" <https://tinyurl.com/yrd6w3em>. Let's forget the old journalism trick of asking a question in a headline, knowing we want the choir to respond, "No!"

By the way, is the weather more extreme? Or is more stuff just in the way of extreme weather events? And are storms more deadly? Or are we doing better at protecting ourselves from them? And is the sea rising fast enough to close down perfectly operating nuclear plants now? We should ask these questions before piling on more energy regulations that cause more over-engineering.

Early in that 360 article, a story about "the 50-year-old wooden cooling towers at the Duane Arnold nuclear power plant in Iowa failed in 130 MPH winds," according to Jeff

Mitman, "a nuclear consultant and a former NRC engineer now involved in a campaign to highlight safety risks at aging nuclear plants." He's advocating for the NRC to weigh climate change in its risk assessments. Read more about him below. By the way there was no damage to Duane Arnold nuclear plant during that August 2020 storm. They permanently closed the plant down because, apparently, they needed new cooling towers to replace the wooden ones. It probably was just more economical to shut the plant down. Score another dead nuclear plant to antinuclear activism.

This brouhaha all started with, what appears to be an expensive, [US Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO) report arguing the NRC does not fully consider the increasing risk that climate change poses to nuclear plant operations and safety.

Side note. In 2022, under pressure from the antinuclear group Miami Water Keeper, the NRC reversed its approval to extend [Florida Power & Light](#) request to renew its operating license (for two reactors) at the Turkey Point nuclear plant, partly due to concerns about rising sea levels. The NRC did finally recommend extension approval, exercising some strategy in that reversal, and Turkey Point's two reactors will now be the first in the US to be approved to run from 60 years to 80 years. However, the Water Keeper's complaint added about two years to the process. I wrote about the Turkey Point license extension here: <https://tinyurl.com/umxp6r9a>.

Back to the GAO. It "has 15 mission teams of analysts, financial auditors, and specialists who work on reports and other products that examine various aspects of federal programs and services." Did you know GAO advises the NRC on safety issues? I didn't know that. Who asked the GAO to produce this report as part of an audit of the NRC? The office simply states, "GAO was asked to review the climate resilience of energy infrastructure." Hmm? What other power sources did the GAO review in addition to nuclear plants? Don't know. Here's the GAO report. NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS, NRC Should Take Actions to Fully Consider the Potential Effects of Climate Change, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106326.pdf>. Does anyone think 130-mile winds might damage wind turbines and solar panels? Should we decommission those?

The NRC responded that they are in "general agreement" with the findings. Of course, they are. What else would you expect? That they'd say, "This is stupid?" You can dig into the full report, which is the point. It's another pit of bureaucratic quicksand. Now, we can spend endless hours talking about various modeled future scenarios about the weather.

According to the nuclear engineer and former NRC nuclear inspector concerned about safety at old nuclear plants, "The weather-related event prematurely and permanently shut down the Duane Arnold." So, 130 MPH winds permanently shut down a nuclear plant? In Iowa. Isn't that place like Kansas, where Dorothy and Toto got transported to

Oz by a tornado in the 1939 movie? I wonder how they came up with that idea back then? Or is there a remote possibility it was antinuclear organizations? You can imagine the rest of the story. . . Our nuclear fleet is growing old. . . Past weather events don't mean nuclear power plants can survive more ferocious, projected, modeled future weather events. . . Storms are increasing in intensity and number as climate change wreaks havoc on the planet. . . while dangerous old nuclear plants risk being damaged and leak radiation into the environment for millions of years. The GAO is on record stating they believe climate change is causing more extreme weather. I would think that position would make nuclear power plants more, not less attractive, as a preferred power source. But that's not the path this is going down.

Disclaimer: I've come to know and respect several professionals at the NRC. I appreciate their service, knowledge, and commitment. But sometimes, I find myself nodding in agreement with people in the nuclear industry who tell me that the NRC, as an institution, is America's No. 1 antinuclear organization. I was hoping that was changing. Weighing climate change as a potential risk factor in extending a nuclear plant's license by 20 years would be an enormous step backward.

It turns out that Jeffery T. Mitman, the former NRC inspector, has been an active antinuclear advocate. I came across this 2021 headline on the NRC website, "DECLARATION OF JEFFERY T. MITMAN IN SUPPORT OF BEYOND NUCLEAR AND SIERRA CLUB HEARING REQUEST." Read the full declaration here:

<https://tinyurl.com/4c7bxtfe>

In item #2, Mitman states, "I have been retained by Beyond Nuclear, Inc. and the Sierra Club to evaluate the Environmental Report submitted by Duke Energy Corp. in connection with its subsequent license renewal (SLR) application to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for a 20-year extension of the license terms for the Oconee Nuclear Plant, Units 1, 2 and 3 (Oconee). My expert report on the application, entitled NRC Relicensing Crisis at Oconee Nuclear Station: *Stop Duke From Sending Safety Over the Jocassee Dam* (September 2021), is attached to my declaration as Exhibit 1. I understand that Beyond Nuclear and the Sierra Club intend to submit a hearing request and waiver petition in this proceeding based on my expert report."

Ahh, so he's the guy employing dam fear in South Carolina. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), <https://tinyurl.com/bdde3ehp>, the NRC has 3,973 permanent workforce and 238 temporary workforce. It has a budget of \$1 billion. The NRC officers report to the U.S. Economic Development Organization (EDO) to "ensure that the commercial use of nuclear materials in the United States is safely conducted." The point is that the NRC is so massive that it will employ people with antinuclear sentiment and maybe even attract people so predisposed. So, it is not

unusual to hear former NRC employees advocating against nuclear energy. Oddly, with all this massive talent and infrastructure at the NRC, we still need the GAO to step in and point out how to add more regulation to the nuclear industry.

Okay. If by now you have not come up with a long list of reasons why it's stupid to add climate-change-modeling considerations when extending a nuclear plant's operational life or inhibiting a new plant's construction, Third Way <https://www.thirdway.org/series/powered-by-nuclear>, a progressive clean energy group, will not say, "This is Stupid." However, if you read Third Way's brief carefully, you might come to that conclusion. Here's its article, "The Increasing Value of Nuclear to Catch Up on Climate" (<https://tinyurl.com/2swwaant>). Of course, Third Way diplomatically points NRC regulators' attention to the herd of 100 elephants in the room, "But we also need nuclear to reduce emissions AND adapt to a changing climate." <https://tinyurl.com/yc72efjn>

Ironically, on the same day, [Zion Lights](#) posted on Substack, "We can build nuclear reactors quickly. Here's how." <https://substack.com/inbox/post/143883445>. In that article, she reminds us, "Building nuclear power plants in China is also seven or eight times cheaper than anywhere else. China currently has 21 nuclear reactors under construction - two and a half times more than any other country - and a new reactor costs [roughly \\$2 billion to build](#) in roughly five years." China will surpass the US in nuclear energy output by about 2032, at the present rate, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=28132> . I don't think US citizens will be okay with that scenario. We'll see.

So that nobody forgets, according to [The Breakthrough Institute](#), "Nuclear Shutdowns Have Already Harmed the Planet. Every year, avoidable nuclear power plant shutdowns release CO2 emissions equivalent to 37 African countries." <https://tinyurl.com/48xudzek>.

The "no nuclear BECAUSE of climate change" is coming up in NRC public Statements. While getting the NRC's approval to repower the Palisades Nuclear Plant, several antinuclear speakers cited climate change, shifting sand dunes, and changing Lake Michigan tides as related to climate change. Antinuclear tactics—they're changing. Let's not let the NRC single out the nuclear industry on this one. All power sources should subject to the same climate change scrutiny.