

Monroe News

April 17, 2009

Federal hearing set on Fermi 3 opposition

by [Charles Slat](#) , last modified April 17, 2009 10:56AM

An environmental coalition's efforts to short-circuit DTE Energy's plans to build a new Fermi 3 nuclear power plant will be the focus of a federal hearing in Monroe next month.

A federal licensing panel will hear arguments May 5 from the groups and from the utility. The coalition portrays a new DTE nuclear plant as a multi-faceted environmental threat. The utility responds that the coalition is engaged in conjecture and also has no legal standing on which to oppose the plant.

"Fermi 3 would represent yet another assault to the Great Lakes," asserts Michael Keegan of Don't Waste Michigan, a Monroe resident who is one of the coalition members. "Fermi 2 has nowhere to get rid of its forever deadly radioactive wastes, and now Detroit Edison wants to make more for the next 60 years at yet another reactor," he said. "This is environmentally, economically and morally bankrupt."

The coalition, consisting of Beyond Nuclear, Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination, Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario, Don't Waste Michigan and the Michigan Chapter of the Sierra Club, outlines its legal contentions against the plant in documents filed with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The contentions are disputed by both the NRC and DTE staffs. The federal Atomic Safety Licensing Board will hold what might be a day-long hearing to consider the coalition and utility arguments in a trial-like setting and later issue a decision that could fuel the opposition or derail it.

In its arguments, the coalition reasserts objections to what it argued would be Fermi 3's radioactive, toxic, and thermal impacts on Lake Erie.

In its responses, DTE disputes the contentions and argues that the coalition hasn't met the test of showing that it risks a "concrete or imminent" injury if the plant construction begins. The utility also claims that instead of presenting facts to bolster its case, the coalition "is doing nothing more than speculating about a hypothetical accident with some likelihood of it impacting themselves."

DTE has requested a federal permit to build and operate a new plant in order to become eligible for a portion of federal financing incentives being made available to encourage plant construction. The utility said it has not yet committed to the project, although it has spent millions preparing and submitting the license application.

"Fermi 3 might make electricity for 60 years, but it would also make a mountain of forever deadly radioactive waste," said Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear, a national watchdog group in Takoma Park, Md. "Fermi 3's radioactive and toxic discharges would endanger Lake Erie, its productive fishereies, area aquifers, and the regional drinking water supply," he added.

The ASLB, a three-judge panel, has scheduled a session at 10 a.m. Tuesday, May 5 to hear oral arguments on the coalition's standing and admissibility of issues it has presented regarding Fermi 3. The hearing isn't expected to go beyond 4 p.m.

Meanwhile, Peter Bradford, a former NRC Commissioner and utility regulation expert, will be speak in Monroe from 7 to 9 p.m. April 23 on the economics of nuclear power. His talk will be in the community room of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 610 W. Elm Ave.