



Regulators approve construction of nuclear reactors in South Carolina

By Andrew Restuccia - 03/30/12 02:12 PM ET

Federal regulators greenlighted the construction of new nuclear reactors Friday for just the second time in longer than three decades.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) voted 4-1 to approve a license allowing construction and conditional operation of two new reactors at Scana Corp.'s Virgil C. Summer nuclear power plant in Fairfield County, S.C. NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko was the lone vote against approving the license.

About two months ago, the commission [approved construction of new reactors](#) at Southern Co.'s Vogtle power plant near Waynesboro, Ga. The February decision marked the first time regulators approved construction of a new reactor since 1978.

Friday's decision is a major victory for the nuclear power industry, which has struggled for years to receive the necessary regulatory approvals to build new reactors.

"The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's approval of the license application to build two new advanced-design reactors continues the needed expansion of our nation's electricity system," said Marvin Fertel, president of the Nuclear Energy Institute, in a statement.

"This will be one of the largest construction and engineering projects in South Carolina history. It will create thousands of well-paying jobs during construction and provide careers for several hundred more people over the decades that the new reactors will generate electricity."

The 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island power plant in Pennsylvania led to widespread fears about nuclear power that greatly slowed the industry's progress.

Last year's nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan revived those fears, and the NRC is working to implement beefed-up rules to ensure U.S. plants are protected from major natural disasters.

Though he voted against issuing the license, Jaczko nonetheless called the decision to allow construction of the South Carolina reactors a "significant milestone."

In his dissent, Jaczko reiterated his longstanding call for the commission to include in the license a requirement that the plant operator — in this case Scana subsidiary South Carolina Electric & Gas —

comply with all post-Fukushima safety standards.

As a condition of receiving the license, the commission is requiring the operator to develop strategies to deal with a loss of power at the plant. But Jaczko said that is not enough.

“I fully support the decision by my colleagues to include this license condition and I consider this important progress in incorporating the lessons from Fukushima,” he wrote in his dissent. “However, I continue to believe that we should require that all Fukushima-related safety enhancements are implemented before these new reactors begin operating.”

Jaczko was also the lone dissenting voice in February when the commission approved the Vogtle license. At the time, he raised similar concerns about incorporating the lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster into the license.

NRC last authorized construction of a new nuclear reactor in 1978 for the Shearon Harris plant in North Carolina.

On Friday, the commission approved a staff-led review of the license application and authorized NRC staff to issue the necessary license in the coming days. The license will allow South Carolina Electric & Gas to build two Westinghouse AP1000 reactors at the Summer plant.

Source:

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