

Nuclear Decommissioning Talks Continue In VT

DAVE GRAM, Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Gov. Peter Shumlin and other top state officials are in talks with the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant's owners about how to dismantle the reactor and handle spent fuel after the plant closes late next year, officials said Thursday.

Shumlin had spoken informally with senior Entergy Corp. officials previously about decommissioning, following the company's Aug. 27 announcement that it would close Vermont Yankee late next year for economic reasons.

Wednesday's session, and a second, similar round of talks set for Dec. 2, mark the first formal negotiations toward a "global agreement" on issues connected with retiring Vermont Yankee, said Chris Recchia, commissioner of the Public Service Department, a participant in the talks.

Recchia said the state's goal is "getting the site cleaned up and restored and available (for re-use) as soon as reasonably possible."

Entergy officials and Shumlin have been at odds in their public statements over the pace of dismantling Vermont Yankee after it closes in late 2014. Shumlin has said he would like to see it happen as quickly as possible.

Entergy executives have said they want to mothball the plant for decades to allow its radioactive components time to become less so and investments in the fund set aside to pay for dismantling the reactor to grow.

Entergy spokesman Mike Burns said in a statement Thursday, "We are working very hard to have a constructive dialogue with Vermont state officials on these important issues. While we have met with the governor and others, we are not going to disclose the details of those discussions."

Those involved in Wednesday's meeting included Shumlin, Recchia, Attorney General William Sorrell and others.

Sorrell said he thought any agreement would focus on decommissioning and spent fuel handling, and not deal much with past disagreements that have led to repeated rounds of litigation between Entergy and the state.

Among those disagreements: the Legislature's effort to block Entergy from operating past its original license's expiration date of March 2012; a new tax lawmakers approved in 2012 to collect about \$12 million a year from the plant, and others.

Even leaving those off the table, there's plenty to talk about in the arena of decommissioning, Sorrell said: "how much work will need to be done on the site,

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what's in the underground piping, how long it's likely to take for the nuclear fuel rods to cool enough that they can be moved — any number of issues."

Another round of legal filings is due at the Public Service Board on Friday on the plant's request for a state certificate of public good to operate for roughly another year. Recchia said his department would use the filing to alert the board to the ongoing negotiations. He said he hoped an agreement could be reached by mid-December.

"The only thing that we're telegraphing in tomorrow's filings is that we are having discussions," Recchia said. "Hopefully they'll (the board will) see this and say, 'Hmm, maybe something's coming. Maybe we should give them a couple of weeks to figure it out.'"

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