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UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS
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Nuclear Regulatory Commission Ignores Public Demands to Stop Water Contamination; Backroom Deal With Industry Group Alleged

WASHINGTON, DC, July 20-The Union of Concerned Scientists today filed formal opposition to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's decision to ignore the growing problem of radioactive tritium leaks from nuclear power plants into water sources. The appeal was made after learning the NRC based its decision on an industry "promise" to monitor the leaks voluntarily. Today's opposition was filed on behalf of the 25 national, state, and local organizations that petitioned the NRC in January 2006 to address the leaks.

"It is outrageous that the NRC would shirk its duties to protect public safety and rely--sight unseen--on an undocumented promise from an industry with a long track record of broken promises," said David Lochbaum, Director of the Nuclear Safety Project at the Union of Concerned Scientists and lead author of the coalition's petition and appeal. "The NRC should reverse this bad decision."

Last fall, it was revealed that millions of gallons of tritium-laden water had leaked from the Braidwood nuclear plant in Illinois into nearby water sources. Smaller leaks have been reported at nuclear facilities in New York, New Jersey, Missouri, Connecticut, and Virginia. On June 28 of this year, the NRC proposed denying the coalition's petition based on a promise allegedly made by a nuclear industry lobbyist to provide information on tritium leaks on a voluntary basis. The Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), a lobby group that only promotes industry interests, presented a sketchy outline of this voluntary initiative to the NRC on July 12--two weeks after the NRC proposed denying the petition.

"How can industry be trusted to monitor itself when many of the leaks occurred for months, perhaps even years, before finally being found?" asked Lochbaum. "Most NRC-licensed facilities haven't looked to see if they also have ongoing leaks, so an already serious problem will only get worse."

In its proposal to deny the petition, the NRC pointed out that nuclear plant owners had a contractual obligation to NEI to provide the information as promised. In today's appeal, the coalition provided the NRC with an abridged list of 10 times over the past decade where nuclear

plant owners were sanctioned by the NRC for violating federal regulations by providing incomplete and/or inaccurate information to the NRC. The coalition questioned whether information provided to the NRC by the industry under a contractual obligation to its own trade group will be likely to be more complete and accurate than this proven track record strongly suggests.

"Apparently, the NRC can't spare the time to worry itself about a public health matter," said Lochbaum. "Move over FEMA, the NRC is about to join you in the penalty box."

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