

*Journal*

*Nuclear Threat  
in Arkansas*

# THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

A Scripps-Howard Newspaper

MICHAEL GREHL, Editor  
Published by The Memphis Publishing Co.  
495 Union Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38101  
JOSEPH R. WILLIAMS, Business Manager

The Memphis Commercial ..... Established 1889  
The Appeal..... Established 1840  
The Avalanche..... Established 1867

Consolidated July 1, 1894

Page 6

Thursday, May 15, 1980

## Russellville Fallout

IT WILL TAKE time to determine what happened Saturday at Arkansas Nuclear One Reactor near Russellville, but even before the dust settles over the facts surrounding the accident, Arkansas Power & Light Co. can make a case for releasing radioactive gas into the atmosphere.

The federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission considered the venting safe and had given its permission. And the NRC, after all, was given final authority over nuclear power by the U.S. Congress.

BUT WAS IT NECESSARY for AP&L to release the gas in defiance of the state Health Department, which had asked for a 48-hour postponement?

Dr. Robert Young, director of the Health Department, said he wanted the delay because "there had been two or three analyses done on the amount of radioactivity in there and there was quite a bit of discrepancy in them. The governor (Bill Clinton) and I both decided that it was important to get this additional information and analysis to be on the safe side and to make sure there would be no danger to public health."

Surely the health and safety of the people of Arkansas are within the province of that state's officials. A state may not have the power to stop a nuclear plant from venting radioactive gas. But absent an emergency demanding immediate action, is there any reason a utility cannot take the time to consider state concerns?

More is at issue, however, than whether the states should have any say over nuclear plants inside their borders. The memory of Three Mile Island still lingers in the public's mind more than a year later. The nation's worst commercial nuclear

accident was accompanied by considerable political fallout, and it doesn't take other nuclear incidents or reminders from antinuclear activists to help people remember that more than a power plant was damaged in that accident.

The credibility of the NRC and a private utility company, Metropolitan Edison, suffered as well because of the way they handled the problem at the Pennsylvania reactor.

Now along comes AP&L, which did more than defy a state Health Department. The utility knew of the Russellville accident for six hours before it notified federal and state officials.

AP&L will have to answer for what happened. Company officials have said that there is no comparison between Russellville and Three Mile Island beyond the fact that the damage to the two Babcock and Wilcox reactors began with leaking seals on coolant pumps. Such assurances, however, will not be enough.

AP&L SHOULD BE sensitive to the public's feelings. Most residents of Russellville may not be bothered by what happened nearby, but nuclear accidents are not only of local concern. Many Americans are uncomfortable enough living around nuclear plants, and they aren't likely to feel any easier if utilities release radioactive gases even though state officials have serious reservations.

We are on record favoring the development of safe nuclear power. We believe it is essential to this country's energy future. But we also believe that a utility company's responsibility doesn't stop when it serves one master, the NRC. Those who produce nuclear energy are obligated to consider the public at large as well as their public regulator.

0PE 07-07