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## Group Praises Orange Co. Commissioners for Success on Nuclear Waste

### *National Implications Cited in Officials' Extraordinary Move to Protect Public*

DURHAM, NC – Environmentalists formally praised the Orange County Board of Commissioners and their political allies this week for helping persuade Progress Energy to stop a major expansion of radioactive waste storage planned for the Shearon Harris nuclear power plant. The shift in plans will eliminate the risks of transporting “spent” fuel rods to Harris – the nation’s only such shipments – and lower both the probability and consequences of a disastrous waste pool fire at Harris.

After five years of controversy over the high-level waste imports, Progress Energy contracted in October with a company to build dry storage containers for waste fuel at its Robinson and Brunswick nuclear plants. Imports to Harris will be reduced within months, and halted by the end of 2005.

Commissioner Margaret Brown said of the County’s actions, ***“We felt it was essential to resolve the scientific issues of such a large storage site. It’s very important that the imports of waste will stop ... this will reduce risks to people living near Harris, both of the other plants and those in between.”*** Commissioner Brown is part of the same board that persisted throughout the contentious issue. The other commissioners are Moses Carey, Alice Gordon, Steve Halkiotis, and Barry Jacobs.

In late 1998, advocacy group NC WARN revealed at a press conference that CP&L (now Progress Energy) was seeking to double its storage capacity for nuclear waste at Harris. Orange County and ten other local governments joined a call for an open review of the expansion, and Orange filed a legal challenge to force the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to conduct scientific hearings and an environmental impact study, saying they are required by federal law. But CP&L worked aggressively to block those measures, and in 2001 the NRC approved Harris’s use of two new cooling pools.

The County’s appeals to federal court failed, but citizen groups continued to press Progress Energy and Attorney General Roy Cooper to stop the imports, particularly as the public became aware of longstanding warnings that nuclear facilities are vulnerable to various forms of attack and have been identified as top targets. Progress said it is stopping the monthly shipments because of licensing issues; NC WARN and others across the region have commended the company for altering its plans.

Speaking to the Board Monday evening, NC WARN Executive Director Jim Warren said, ***“In addition to preventing thirty years worth of nuclear waste imports, your vigorous legal challenge reduced risks by causing CP&L to conduct additional inspection of the new pools, and by keeping the project in the public eye – with over 600 news articles.”*** Warren said the County’s legal case also advanced the national science regarding waste pool fires, and led to this year’s powerful Princeton study confirming the need to eliminate high-density pools at all plants.

***“You have inspired people across the region who rarely witness government officials asserting local authority over giant corporations and federal bureaucracies on behalf of the public wellbeing,”*** Warren told the Orange board. He praised the county officials for standing firm despite CP&L’s extensive flexing of corporate muscle to quiet area elected and civic leaders by funding pet projects, political campaigns, and image advertising.

In a letter to the commissioners, Warren commended them for earnestly informing themselves about the unusual

risks of a waste pool fire, and their “brilliant move” in assigning County Engineer Paul Thames to coordinate the County’s potent legal/technical team of Diane Curran, Gordon Thompson and David Lochbaum. ***The group also expressed particular appreciation to State Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy, Durham Commissioner Joe Bowser, former Chatham Commissioner Gary Phillips, and former Carrboro Alderman Allen Spalt, who were consistently active during the project, and to their respective government boards for supporting the legal effort.***

Shearon Harris will remain one of the nation’s largest storage sites of highly radioactive waste for decades regardless of whether a proposed repository in Nevada ever opens. NC WARN is urging Progress Energy to transfer spent fuel out of high-density pools and into hardened, dispersed dry storage in order to reduce the risk of attacks or accidents that could lead to a devastating nuclear fire.

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The letter to Orange County commissioners can be found at [www.ncwarn.org](http://www.ncwarn.org)

*NC WARN is a member-based grassroots organization using science and activism to reduce hazards to public health and the environment from industrial and radioactive pollution.*