

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 9, 2018

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Groups Challenge Plant Vogtle Cooling Tower Permit

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and its chapter Concerned Citizens of Shell Bluff have filed detailed comments opposing the state's air pollution permit for Plant Vogtle. In the comments, the groups oppose the excessive levels of hazardous air pollution emitted from the cooling towers and other sources in a community already stressed by power plant impacts. They called upon the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to reject the permit.

Charles Utley, Associate Director of the League, said, "If this permit is approved, the residents' health will be left in limbo." Under the federal Clean Air Act, contamination by all hazardous pollutants including radioactive must be reduced to the lowest possible levels. Utley continued, "This permit fails to protect public health. That's why we oppose it." He said that the groups have requested that EPD hold a public hearing in Burke County to allow residents to voice their concerns.

Louis Zeller, Executive Director of the League, said, "The permit sidesteps the state's obligation to protect air quality using loopholes in the law." His analysis of the permit concludes that the permit for the nuclear plant must include the impacts of a nearby fossil-fueled electric generating plant. The permit for Plant Vogtle specifically omits the pollution from Plant Wilson, a combustion turbine plant located next to the nuclear station. Under federal law, an air permit cannot be issued without all sources of

pollution accounted for.

Combustion turbines emit many types of pollution, such as: nitrogen oxides, benzene and formaldehyde. Plant Vogtle cooling towers consume 43 million gallons of water per day. Hot water is pumped to the top of the towers and is emitted in a fine mist along with contaminants. Zeller added, “Pollutants from both facilities are inhaled by residents.”

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division Air Protection Branch wrote the proposed permit based on an application submitted by Georgia Power/Southern Company in 2017. The duration of the permit, if approved by the state, would be five years.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League was founded in 1984 and has had an office in Augusta since 2002. The League issued its first review of air pollution at Vogtle in 2010.

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