



The Honorable Jim Desmond
San Diego County Supervisor
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego CA 92101

March 24, 2020

Re: Halting the burial of SONGS nuclear waste / COVID19

Dear Supervisor Desmond,

Would you trust a pilot landing a 747 with a 102 degree fever? Or, would you want someone with a fever working as an air traffic controller? Yet at San Onofre, it is possible that sick workers could be downloading 100,000 pound canisters of deadly radioactive nuclear waste while disabled by COVID19.

When you attend Southern California Edison's CEP Live Stream meeting this Thursday evening, we are requesting that you ask the following question:

“Considering Edison's commitment to ‘Safety, Stewardship and Community Engagement,’ will Edison halt the burial of nuclear waste during the COVID19 crisis?”

Because you are the only San Diego representative on Edison's San Onofre Community Engagement Panel (CEP), it is essential that you urge Southern California Edison to comply with Governor Newsom's Executive Order to shelter in place by halting the burial of spent nuclear fuel until the COVID19 crisis has passed.

It is true that there are many essential workers at SONGS. But, there are also many more non-essential workers doing non-essential work. Much of this non-essential work involves the transfer of deadly nuclear waste. Sick workers are accident prone. It is likely many of the workers engaged in the unnecessary transfer of nuclear waste at this time are infected with COVID19. Therefore, these workers represent a clear and present danger to the well being of California communities at the level of nuclear security and COVID19 safety.

Southern California Edison has set a precedent for temporary halts to nuclear waste burials at SONGS for safety reasons. One example was when nuclear waste burial was

halted from August 3, 2018, to July 15, 2019, after what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission called a “near-miss” radiation accident. At that time, less than half of the fuel had been removed from the pools. Currently about 75% of the spent nuclear fuel has been removed. The spent fuel pools at SONGS are no longer overcrowded by any standard.

As public safety advocates, Public Watchdogs has conducted due diligence relevant to SONGS and COVID19. We have reviewed Governor Newsom’s most recent executive order defining “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers” (attached). “Workers needed for safe and secure operations at nuclear generation” are no longer necessary because San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) has not generated electricity since 2012.

1) A failed nuclear power plant does not meet the requirement of “essential industry”: Black’s Law Dictionary defines “essential industry” as “Industries an economic society declares as critical. The industries as well as their suppliers are included ... Steel, gas, electricity and communications are just a few examples.”

SONGS has not generated electricity since 2012.

2) Edison is not in compliance with COVID19 worker health protection at every level of government: Edison is out of compliance with COVID19 regulations and guidelines at the federal, state and local levels. SCE’s is obligated to ensure “worker health protection”.¹

Edison’s own 9-23-2014 NRC Post-Shutdown Decommissioning Activities Report specifies: “SCE will continue to comply with federal, state, and local requirements for non-radiological interfaces with the environment including limitations on water withdrawal and discharges, air emissions including criteria pollutants and fugitive dust, noise levels, protection of avian, terrestrial and aquatic species, cultural resources, disposal of non-radiological waste, and worker health protection.” [emphasis added]²

3) Decommissioning workers at SONGS are increasing the risk of public contagion: Governor Gavin Newsom said the corona virus could infect 56% of Californians over 8 weeks. The only way to minimize worker exposure is enforce a complete halt of nonessential work. Hundreds of workers traveling in and out of the facility and back into our communities defies the intent of the Governor’s

¹ See *Executive Order N-33-20*, March 19, 2020 at <https://bit.ly/3bx8QP9> and *Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers*, March 22, 2020, page 4, Essential Workforce - Electricity industry at <https://bit.ly/2J7xUzS>

² See page 33, *San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Units 2 and 3 Post-Shutdown Decommissioning Activities Report*, 09-23-2014 Adams Accession Number ML14269A033 at <https://bit.ly/2y1wvZj>

executive order.

4) Sick workers increase the risk of a fuel handling accident: Given the number of workers at SONGS, it is a 100% certainty that many of these workers are already infected with COVID19. Sick workers increase the probability of an accident. With COVID19, a fever can strike suddenly, impairing the judgement of crane operators, spotters, redundant safety personnel, and supervisors. In the next few days many workers who are significant to safety are going to become ill with COVID19.

5) Allowing fuel transfers at SONGS could overwhelm medical multiple facilities: The workers at SONGS currently reside in San Diego and Orange counties. The nature of the industry requires many of them to be transient workers that come from all over the country and other nuclear sites. They move from hotel to motel, sometimes renting rooms from local residents. They often return to their home states and families for weekends and holidays. But when they get sick here, they will be treated here, adding to the burden of an overwhelmed health care system.

6) There is a precedent for temporary shutdowns at SONGS: Nuclear waste burial was halted for nearly a year from August 3, 2018 to July 15, 2019 after what the NRC called a ‘near-miss’ radiation accident. On March 10, 2018, just six weeks into the burial, the site was shutdown for 10 days after it was revealed that bolts were breaking inside the canisters.

7) The Spent Fuel Pools are no longer overcrowded: More than 75% of the deadly radioactive waste at San Onofre has been removed from the spent fuel pools. When San Onofre was shut down for a year in 2018-2019, less than half of the fuel had been removed from the pools. The pools are no longer “overcrowded” by any standard.

8) A documented history of a recklessly cavalier safety culture: Southern California Edison, Holtec, and their subcontractors, have repeatedly demonstrated a history of unsafe nuclear waste movement documented by the NRC’s March 25, 2019, Final Inspection Report prompted by the August 2018 ‘near-miss’ accident calling for civil penalties and corrective action.³

³ See Nuclear Regulatory Commission [Special Inspection Report](#) 050-00206/2018-005, 050-00361/2018-005, 050-00362/2018-005, 072-00041/2018-001, dated March 25, 2019 at <https://bit.ly/2UjyJMB>

While it is true that SONGS is on the Governor's list of entities that have "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers" the majority of workers involved in moving and packaging nuclear waste at SONGS are completely unnecessary to the generation of electricity, or the safety of nuclear waste.

For the safety of these workers, their families, and our communities, all work involving the transport and burial of deadly nuclear waste at SONGS should be halted immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Langley". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Charles Langley
Executive director, Public Watchdogs

cc: Jaunita Hayes, Director of Community Relations, District 5, Jim Desmond
Nina Babiarz, and Public Watchdogs Board Member