

PRESS RELEASE: Georgia WAND Releases Report on the Nexus of Climate Change, the Nuclear Industry, and Southern Communities

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Contact: Lindsay Harper
Program and Communications Manager
Georgia WAND Education Fund
lindsay@georgiawand.org
(404) 428-7440

Georgia WAND Releases Report on the Nexus of Climate Change, the Nuclear Industry, and Southern Communities

*Environmental group calls for clean energy, sustainable local
economies, and long-term health research*

Atlanta, GA: On Wednesday 12/13, at the Public Service Commission's hearing of Georgia Power's 17th semiannual construction monitoring report for Plant Vogtle, Georgia WAND released a new report on the dangerous clash between climate change and the nuclear industry, and its effects on communities in Georgia. Executive Director Becky Rafter gave the report to each PSC commissioner and urged them to consider the facts laid out in the report when deciding about the expansion of nuclear power Plant Vogtle.

The report, entitled “[Community Impacts at the Crossroads of Nuclear and Climate Injustices in the U.S. South](#)” was co-authored by Georgia WAND’s Becky Rafter and Nuclear Information & Resource Service (NIRS)’s Mary Olson, with support from by Jumana Master, Agnes Scott College Bevier Public Health Intern.

The report was published a week before the Public Service Commissioners makes their December 21st decision on whether to continue charging ratepayers for the construction of two new reactors on Plant Vogtle and to approve Georgia Power’s doubling of the estimated costs. Currently the country’s only nuclear power plant under construction, Vogtle has been wrought with cost and schedule overruns wasting billions of ratepayer dollars. Earlier this year, South Carolina utilities abandoned the construction of two nuclear reactors.

A combination of scientific research and community expertise, the report details the effects of climate change on nuclear reactors. As it highlights the need to center communities and craft public policy that addresses jobs and jobs training, the report addresses the vulnerabilities of, and dangers to, communities living and working near and at the reactor sites when considering climate change effects. Sustainable local economies, emergency preparedness, nuclear harm reduction protocols, funding, and public health research are also prominently addressed.

“It’s a crucial time for people to understand the connection between nuclear and the climate,” says Rafter. “We’re at a crossroads in Georgia and globally about continuing the use of nuclear interventions as energy and foreign policy solutions. We must center

local voices from affected communities in building a peaceful, sustainable economy for the future.”

“Ignorance or scam, either way, promoting the idea that nuclear could solve the climate crisis is backwards,” said Mary Olson of NIRS. “Chaotic, increasingly severe weather is forcing nuclear power reactors to shut down more often. Reactors cannot operate without off-site power, and so are increasingly unreliable, requiring replacement power.”

On Thursday 12/14, Georgia WAND hosted a [tele-press conference](#) announcing the report. [To listen to the full audio recording of the conference call, click here.](#) [An executive summary of the report is available here.](#)

Lynn Ringenberg, MD, former president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, said that tritium, a radionuclide released from nuclear weapons and power plants, is increasingly dangerous in a changing climate. And not all people are affected equally.

“Evidence shows that women are more vulnerable than men, and children are more vulnerable than adults— especially as an embryo, as a fetus, and as a newborn child,” said Ringenberg.

“As global temperatures rise, as ice caps melt and sea levels rise, and water temperatures increase, there will be more humidity held in air. Tritium will disperse further and faster, and will likely make it more toxic in the coming years,” added Ringenberg.

Jumana Master, a co-author of the report, said her research shows a strong need for long-term public health research studies in communities near nuclear sites.

“We know that nuclear radiation is harmful to health--we just don’t know how harmful in places like Burke County that haven’t been studied. We must collect long-term data on nuclear radiation and health impacts in areas where monitoring isn’t happening,” said Master.

The negative public health impacts, the compounded environmental burden of the industry on communities that are rural, primarily low-income, and marginalized are all considered consequential segments of the report in that Plant Vogtle is sited in such close proximity of the Savannah River Site (SRS) nuclear weapons complex.

Nathaniel Smith, founder and Chief Equity Officer of the Partnership for Southern Equity, spoke about the injustice of the fact that the dual threat of climate change and nuclear sites are affecting the most vulnerable communities.

“Communities of color, rural communities, and low-income communities shouldn’t have to choose between gainful employment and their health,” said Smith.

Natalie Herrington, a community organizer for Georgia WAND who lives in Burke County, near Plant Vogtle and downstream from the Savannah River Site nuclear weapons complex, spoke on what she sees as the true needs of her community.

“The billions of dollars spent of Plant Vogtle’s expansion could be spent in our communities, creating a jobs policies program, creating emergency management plans, restoring the community,” said Herrington.

Georgia WAND asks the Public Service Commission to deny Georgia Power expenditures for Vogtle’s expansion of units 3 & 4, especially when the public does not know the extent of the harm the industry is causing. Instead, Georgia WAND believes that funds should be invested in community-led policies to move toward local, sustainable economies, renewable energy, and emergency preparedness, and that industry should invest in nuclear harm reduction protocols.

The Thursday 12/14 tele-press conference featured the following speakers: Colette Pichon Battle, executive director of the US Human Rights Network; Jumana Master, former Agnes Scott College Bevier Public Health Intern at Georgia WAND; Natalie Herrington, Georgia WAND Community Organizer; Dr. Lynn Ringenberg, Physicians for Social Responsibility; Becky Rafter, Executive Director, Georgia WAND; and Nathaniel Smith, Executive Director, Chief Equity Officer, Partnership for Southern Equity.

To listen to the [full audio recording](#) of the conference call, [click here](#).

About Georgia WAND Education Fund, Inc.

Georgia WAND Education Fund, Inc. educates the public and opinion leaders about the need to reduce violence and militarism in society, and redirect excessive military spending to unmet human and environmental needs.