Duke may seek another license extension

BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN
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SALEM — Oconee Nuclear Station is good to go for several more years and a further extension of the facility's operating license is not out of the question, according to Scott Batson, who will soon become the site's station manager.

Batson told community leaders gathered at ONS last week that, while the site is currently licensed for 60 years, a further extension may be sought. That decision, he said, would hinge on maintenance costs, the impact shutting ONS down would have on the Duke Energy operating system and the cost of replacing the plant with a new facility.

In response to a question about Duke having purchased enough land back from its real estate partner, Crescent Resources, to build additional units near ONS, Batson said a site in this area is "still an option moving forward." However, he quickly added, "That is not our focus right now."



Batson

Duke, he said, is focused on a proposed new, two-unit nuclear facility near Gaffney for which a license is expected in 2013.

Both Batson and Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman Andy Sabisch indicated that, for the immediate future, nuclear development will likely center on enhanced versions of the Westinghouse AP1000 and not what Sabisch referred to as "cutting edge" technologies being used in other countries. The AP1000 is used at ONS.

"The AP1000 is a proven technology that has a simplified but very safe system. There may be others that are more efficient, but our goal is to reduce the time it takes to get units on line," Sabisch said.

Batson, who will become station manager effective Oct. 1, also addressed what he referred to as a "flurry" of recent safety incidents.

"None of them were related to each other," Batson said of monitoring interruptions that were significant enough to require NRC notification.

Batson also said the incidents were not related to aging of the facility, which came on line in 1973. An original 40-year operating license has been renewed for 20 more years.

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