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## Nuclear safety commission calls for N.B. reactor licence extension

SAINT JOHN, N.B. - Staff with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission have recommended a one-year extension to NB Power's licence to operate the Point Lepreau nuclear generating station.

A hearing has been set in Ottawa for Jan. 19, at which time a tribunal will decide whether to grant the extension to the nuclear reactor's existing five-year operating licence.

The current licence is set to expire June 30.

During the hearing, NB Power will also provide the commission with an update on the plant's refurbishment, which is more than two years behind schedule.

Additionally, commission staff members will present the findings of their annual safety assessment for the generating station.

The session will be heard by a panel of independent board members who are not bound by the staff recommendations.

NB Power is requesting the one-year extension of its existing operating licence in order to continue focusing on refurbishment activities that are scheduled to continue beyond the current licence's end date. An approval would extend the same terms and conditions as specified in the current licence.

The commission's decision to hold a one-day hearing in Ottawa has sparked an outcry from a coalition that wants the hearings held in New Brunswick.

"Having it in Ottawa in the middle of January instead of New Brunswick, it's a bit much to ask us," said Willie Nolan, a member of the Point Lepreau Decommissioning Caucus.

Nolan said members have concerns about the cost and safety of the plant and believe the reactor is a white elephant that should be shut down.

Commission spokesman Auree Gervais said the agency believes that since the hearing is to renew the current licence for a period of only one year under the same terms and conditions, there is no need to have a comprehensive hearing in New Brunswick.

"Because the (facility) is currently in a de-fuelled state and experiencing delays in its refurbishment activities, the commission is conducting a simplified one-day hearing," he said.

Gervais said the commission has committed to holding part of its next Lepreau hearing in New Brunswick. That's when it will decide whether to grant a five-year permit for the plant's startup and operation.

"The upcoming hearing is not about reopening the debate about refurbishment," he said. "That issue was discussed at the public hearing for the Point Lepreau licence renewal in 2006."