

Better Energy Options Available to Utah Communities

A new cost analysis on small modular nuclear reactors released

June 20, 2019, Salt Lake City, UT - Today the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL Utah) released an independent study on the increased costs of small modular nuclear reactors for ratepayers compared to alternative sources of electricity. HEAL is urging the almost 30 towns throughout Utah to delay their participation in the Utah Associated Municipal Power System's (UAMPS) proposed small modular nuclear reactors.

UAMPS' project would bring nuclear power to Utah for the first time in the form of small modular nuclear reactors (SMNRs) to be located in southern Idaho. SMNRs are a new, untested type of nuclear reactor that relies on the same basic technology and fuel as traditional reactors to generate electricity and creates just as much high-level radioactive waste per megawatt.

"The nuclear industry has a long history of project cost overruns, time-table delays, and failures," said Dr. Scott Williams, HEAL Utah's Executive Director. "In some cases, nuclear projects leave local communities deep in debt and ratepayers are burdened with repaying that debt over decades. There is no reason to believe that this project will be any different."

In addition to ratepayer and environmental repercussions, HEAL highlights the fact that major utilities and venture capital firms have rejected SMNRs as a poor risk. Energy Strategies, a Salt Lake City-based energy modeling firm, was engaged to conduct an independent study comparing the cost of SMNRs to comparable portfolios of low or non-carbon emitting resources.

This study found that alternative scenarios that include various combinations of wind, solar, energy storage, market purchases, and small amounts of natural gas were roughly 40% cheaper than SMNRs. Even when the lowest cost for SMNRs was considered, the alternative portfolios remained less expensive. These other scenarios represent hundreds of millions in savings over a 20-year period in comparison to SMNRs. As the predicted costs of solar, wind, and battery storage resources continue to decline, the likelihood increases that these resources will be even less costly than SMNRs.

"With the proven, safer, and cheaper alternatives available, Utah towns should reconsider their participation in this project," said HEAL Utah's Senior Policy Associate, Michael Shea. "SMNRs are an unnecessary, high-risk project that has the potential to put communities on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars over the next 20 years, and possibly billions over the 80 year lifetime of the project."

HEAL recommends that these UAMPS cities and towns delay further votes on SMNR participation until an independent and comprehensive cost comparison study is completed that includes all renewable options, as would be done by any major utility.

“The city councils in these towns are all that stand between the pocketbooks of ratepayers and a lack of due diligence by the promoters of these SMNRs,” said Claire Geddes, Utah’s long-time consumer advocate. “The council members need to hit the pause button and look at all of their options before they commit their citizens to forty years of unnecessarily high power bills.”

The UAMPS members considering this project are: Beaver, Blanding, Bountiful, Brigham City, Central Utah Water Conservancy District, Enterprise, Ephraim, Fairview, Fillmore, Heber City Light & Power, Hurricane, Hyrum, Kanosh, Kaysville, Lehi, Logan, Monroe, Mt. Pleasant, Murray, Oak City, Parowan, Payson, Santa Clara, South Utah Valley Electric Service District, Spring, Washington, and Weber Basin Conservancy District.

Learn more about and download the study at www.healutah.org/smnrs. Watch the Facebook livestream of today's press conference on HEAL Utah's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/HEALUtah.

HEAL Utah had no input in the assumptions, methodology, or findings of the study. The policy conclusions and recommendations are those of HEAL Utah. Energy Strategies conducted the cost analysis will respond to questions about the report's assumptions and methodology but they do not take a position on whether any community should or should not subscribe to the Carbon Free Power Project.

About HEAL Utah:

The Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL Utah) has been an environmental advocacy organization, watchdog, and strategic influencer in Utah since 1999. By empowering grassroots advocates, using science-based solutions, and developing common-sense policy, HEAL has a track record of tackling some of the biggest threats to Utah’s environment and public health — and succeeding. The organization focuses on clean air, energy and climate, and radioactive waste. HEAL uses well-researched legislative, regulatory, and individual responsibility approaches to create tangible change, and then utilizes grassroots action to make it happen.

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