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ERWIN – Saying enough was enough with actions at Nuclear Fuel Services, an unhappy public on Thursday vented their displeasure with the company and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

In a meeting at Town Hall that started at 6 p.m. and was still in progress about 9 p.m., area residents raised a host of grievances about the NRC, such as a penchant for notifying the public at inopportune times that sometimes give the public little time to respond. The public also blasted NFS and its parent company, Babcock & Wilcox, for their performances, renewing concerns about past activities at the plant and the company's current status.

“NFS has had a very long history of safety problems, and, of course, they are under the confirmatory order concerning safety problems,” Erwin resident Chris Tipton said. “And yet, with that you are still giving them license amendments to expand processes.”

One of those is a commercial development line, for which the NFS has recently received a license amendment from the NRC. The amendment will enable the company to purify high-enriched uranium for reuse by the U.S. Energy Department or convert it to a low-enriched form to be used on site.

Joe Shea, director of the fuel facility inspection division for the NRC, said the company will not be able to operate the facility, which is expected to be used for three months unless new business develops, still will have to complete a readiness review before the facility can be used.

“I realize that a business to be functional and make ends meet and to make a profit, they've got to have business, they've got to have processes,” Tipton said. “But still, it has to be our concern that they are not up to snuff on safety and never have been. And the other thing is that they are in close proximity to this town and to a very dense population area of schools and hospitals and nursing homes and a town and a business sector. It's still going to be a concern to us about safety and about anything and everything that's going on out there.”

In a brief interview outside the meeting, NFS spokesman Lauri Turpin said the company was not bad as the public portrayed inside the building.

“It's clear that the people here are very passionate about their community as are the employees of NFS,” she said. “We live in the community as well. The bottom line has been NFS could not be operating if we were not operating safely. We operate safely.”

“We operate within the requirements set by the NRC. Even though we right now are operating within our license requirements, we continue to improve.”

Shea said he would pass on the public’s frustrations about the notices Modica said sometimes come the day before a holiday. But NRC representatives said they try in their reports to be helpful to the public and sometimes use language that enables them to tell what is happening at NFS without compromising any requirements to protect classified information.

Steve Burris, an NRC inspector assigned full time at the NFS plant, also said the federal agency has used a poor choice of words when it describes something in the plant as newly installed. Erwin resident Sam Pinkerton said that gives the public the impression more equipment and processes have been initiated at the plant, possibly posing safety concerns for him. The NRC said that is not necessarily what it is conveying.