

Lou Dobbs tonight

America's Security Risks: Nuclear Power Plants

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KITTY PILGRIM: In our special report, "America's Security Risks," tonight, our threat to nuclear power plants. Attorneys general from seven states are calling for tighter security. They say much more needs to be done to prevent an attack on one of the more than 100 nuclear plants across this country.

Bill Tucker reports.

BILL TUCKER, CNN FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENT: The nuclear power industry in America has rarely known a quiet day. For the last several decades, it's been wracked with controversy from the building of a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon in California to the accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania.

Plagued by ongoing debates over where to safely dispose of radioactive waste and accusations of too cozy a relationship between the industry and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

DANIELLE BRIAN, PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT: Really the problem we have is a government agency that is so close to the industry that they are simply unwilling to say, you know what, I'm sorry that you don't like this, you're going to have to increase security to the levels that we've decided are appropriate.

TUCKER: Today, there are 103 commercial nuclear plants operating at 64 sites in 31 states, and, according to the NRC, they've never been safer.

NILS DIAZ, CHAIRMAN, NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION: I think nuclear power plant facilities in the United States are as safe as they should be. We have increased security in the power plants rapidly after 9/1. We continue to do so. We are very confident that they are safe, that they are secure, and that we have done what need to be done to protect the American people.

TUCKER: In January of this year, attorneys general from seven states -- California, Arizona, Wisconsin, Illinois, Arkansas, New York and Connecticut -- wrote letters in support of a petition presented to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by Mothers for Peace and the Committee to Bridge the Gap. They want security measures around the plants tightened.

BILL LOCKYER, CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY GENERAL: I know because I have

law-enforcement personnel what the specifics are in California, and I do not think that they are secure and enhanced in a way that's adequate.

TUCKER: The industry defends itself, noting that its plants are physically strong structures which they say can withstand the impact of a commercial jetliner. While defending their own security measures, they do say there needs to be better cooperation with state and federal response teams.

MARVIN FENTEL, NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE: We've done a lot in the last three years. The federal government's done a lot. But we haven't been able to yet integrate it to what I would say is an optimum situation.

TUCKERS: Now critics say the plants should be able to withstand an attack by 19 attackers, just like we faced on 9/11. They NRC says they have updated their standards from pre-9/11 levels, but, Kitty, they won't tell us by how much, pleading the case of secrecy.

PILGRIM: Well, understandably so. Nevertheless, a disturbing report. Thanks very much.