

Land-Use Planning and the Siting of Nuclear Power Plants

The siting of nuclear fission power plants is a sensitive matter, for obvious reasons. The planning process, which involves both state and federal agencies, is correspondingly complex.

It is made still more complex by the fact that-nongeologic considerations aside-the geologic constraints may be poorly understood. This is, to some extent, the case in New England, at least with respect to seismic hazards. While the region now is generally quiet seismically, significant earthquakes are reported to have occurred in the eighteenth century. The region itself is a passive continental margin, not an active plate boundary, and the reasons for the so-called Cape Ann earthquakes are not obvious. This introduces an element of uncertainty about the extent to which seismic hazards can or should be taken into account in siting power plants in the region.