

Federal mediators intervene in Callaway nuclear plant dispute

Unseemly ... it is merely a labor dispute, but it labelled as 'nuclear.'

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A dispute between private security guards at Ameren's Callaway nuclear power plant in Fulton, Mo., and a Florida-based contractor is now in the hands of federal labor mediators.

After working for more than a year without a contract, members of the local United Government Security Guards of America complained to the National Labor Relations Board.

Earlier this month, the federal agency responded with a proposal to award the guards back pay from Jan. 1, amounting to a retroactive 3.7 percent wage increase. Additional back pay would be awarded to guards in response to changes in their training schedule.

But a spokesman for the Wackenhut Corp. told The Fulton Sun that the company has no intention of signing the voluntary agreement.

"You won't see my signature on it," said Dan Murphy, Wackenhut's director of labor relations and corporate counsel. "(The NLRB) has proposed a settlement ... that clearly elevates the rights of the union over the rights of the employees."

In June, more than half the guards at the Callaway nuclear plant signed a petition to break away from the fledgling union. In response, Wackenhut posted a notice that it no longer recognizes the union at the plant, which is owned by St. Louis-based Ameren Corp.

An Ameren spokesman contacted Monday declined comment beyond stating that the dispute is between Wackenhut and the union.

Wackenhut employs about 85 guards to provide 24-hour security at the plant. Union members say the plant's low pay causes high turnover, which in turn creates a greater risk.

Wage rates before union negotiations ranged from \$13.50 to \$16.17 an hour, and the company paid 92 percent of the employee and family medical insurance costs, Murphy has previously said.

The NLRB could enforce the settlement through the federal courts if management does not agree to its terms, union organizers said.