

August 29, 2000

Mr. Ernest Zodian
P. O. Box 62
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756

SUBJECT: CONCERNS YOU RAISED TO THE NRC REGARDING A LEAKING FUEL ROD
AT THE OYSTER CREEK NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Dear Mr. Zodian:

This letter refers to the concerns that you expressed to Mr. Thomas Hipschman, the NRC resident inspector at Oyster Creek, on August 1, 2000, related to the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station. You informed us of concerns you had received from another individual that there is a leaking fuel rod affecting the spent fuel pool chemistry, and management is not aware that people are working to locate the problem. Additionally, you asked whether the leaking fuel rod affects the license, and the viability of safely transferring and using the spent fuel pool and the interim spent fuel storage facility.

We have reviewed these concerns. You indicated that the fuel leak was affecting spent fuel pool chemistry. Upon review, we found that you were likely referring to a fuel assembly leaking within the reactor vessel, which was affecting reactor coolant system chemistry. The fuel leak in the reactor vessel became known to plant management shortly after detection by noting changes in reactor coolant system chemistry. Our resident inspectors closely monitored the actions of the plant staff to reduce the effects of the leak. We concluded that plant management's actions in dealing with this fuel leak were appropriate. As has been done at other nuclear facilities with leaking fuel, Oyster Creek management will remove the leaking fuel from the reactor vessel during the next refueling outage, currently scheduled for mid-October 2000. The removed fuel will be placed into the spent fuel pool and will be examined to determine the extent and exact location of the leak.

Regarding your concerns with the spent fuel pool and the interim spent fuel storage facility, leaking fuel does not typically cause a chemistry or transfer problem because the leak is greatly reduced when the temperatures and pressures are reduced. From the NRC's perspective the leaking fuel also has no affect on the staff's approval of the license transfer from a regulatory or safety point of view, because the same requirements apply to whoever owns the plant. Please note that transfer of ownership of the plant was completed on August 8, 2000, and AmerGen Energy Co. is the current owner.

In summary, we believe the fuel leak you were concerned about was in the reactor vessel rather than the spent fuel pool. Plant management and the NRC were aware of the leak shortly after detection, the leaking fuel was properly monitored, neutron flux was appropriately suppressed, and all actions taken were consistent with past practices in the nuclear industry and were consistent with management expectations and NRC requirements. Additionally, the leaking fuel is expected to have little or no affect on the chemistry in the spent fuel pool or the ability to safely transfer the fuel for proper and safe storage.

In this letter, we have provided our assessment of the facts as we understand them for the event about which you have expressed concern and believe that we are being responsive to

that concern. However, should you have any additional questions, or if the NRC can be of further assistance in this matter, please call me at 610-337-5146.

Sincerely,

/RA/

John F. Rogge, Chief
Projects Branch 7
Division of Reactor Projects

Docket No. 50-219

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