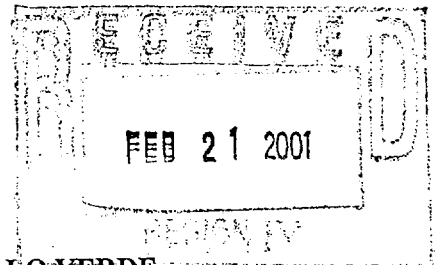




Union of Concerned Scientists

February 16, 2001

Ms. Linda Joy Smith, Chief
Project Branch D, Division of Reactor Projects
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
611 Ryan Plaza Drive, Suite 400
Arlington, TX 76011-8064



SUBJECT: SPENT FUEL POOL INSTRUMENTATION AT PALO VERDE

Dear Ms. Smith:

NRC Inspection Report No. 50-528/00-11; 50-529/00-11; 50-530/00-11 dated January 25, 2001, included a discussion of an event that happened at Palo Verde Unit 3 on December 8, 2000. According to the inspection report, approximately 27,000 gallons of water were inadvertently transferred from the refueling water tank to the spent fuel pool due to a valve lineup error complicated by a failure to follow procedures. The spent fuel pool overflowed and spilled approximately 1,200 gallons into the fuel building. The final sentence of the third paragraph of the inspection report stated:

The spent fuel pool high-level alarm did not function.

The report provides no additional details on this point. I assume that the alarm did not function due to a mechanical or electrical problem. But it is possible that the alarm did not function because it had a bad setpoint (i.e., the water found a pathway out of the pool before rising to the setpoint level).

To help me understand this event more completely, I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. Why did the spent fuel pool high-level alarm not function?
2. Had the spent fuel pool high-level alarm functioned, would the overflow event been terminated prior to water spilling into the fuel building?
3. What was the total radiation dose to workers involved in cleaning up the spilled water?
4. Is the spent fuel pool high-level alarm classified as safety-related?
5. How often is the spent fuel pool high-level alarm functionally tested by procedure?

Sincerely,

David Lochbaum
Nuclear Safety Engineer