

June 19, 2001

Ms. Molly Scott Lee
21 Riviera Terrace
Segmore, CT 06470

Dear Ms. Scott Lee:

As requested by Mr. Richard Blumenthal, Attorney General, State of Connecticut, in his letter to our office dated May 25, 2001, we are responding to your concerns about radioactive waste discharges to the Connecticut River from the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Vernon, Vermont. Mr. Blumenthal provided us a copy of your letter to his office. From your letter, we understand that your concerns were based on comments made during a broadcast segment of National Public Radio's (NPR), "All Things Considered," on February 16, 2001. Based on your understanding of that broadcast, you stated that Vermont Yankee "... dumps curium waste into the Connecticut River"; expressed concern about the effect of such practice on public health and safety, and the environment; and desired that NRC take immediate action to stop the dumping of curium.

We listened to an archived recording of NPR's February 16, 2001 broadcast, which is available on NPR's web page, www.npr.org. The 6 minute broadcast segment discussed the emerging interest in nuclear power generation and development, and focused on the commercial aspects of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Vernon, Vermont. The segment did not contain any assertion that Vermont Yankee ever discharged curium waste into the Connecticut River. However, one of the interviewees indicated that Vermont Yankee had released "curies" of radioactive waste into the "Connecticut River Valley." You may have misunderstood the reference to "curies" (a measurement unit for radioactivity) as "curium," and the reference to "the Connecticut River Valley" (the geographical region) as the "Connecticut River." Notwithstanding, we have confirmed that Vermont Yankee has not discharged curium waste into the Connecticut River.

NRC licensed nuclear power plants, including Vermont Yankee, are permitted to release limited amounts of radioactive materials, i.e., liquid and gaseous effluents, as planned discharges in accordance with very stringent NRC regulatory requirements. The NRC's regulatory limits are designed to provide assurance of public health and safety, and protection of the environment. Typically, planned discharges from NRC licensed facilities result in a dose equivalent that is only a fraction of the actual regulatory limit, and not distinguishable from normal background radiation. The NRC requires licensed nuclear power plants to provide annual reports of all radioactive effluent releases; and regularly inspects the licensee's conduct of the radioactive effluent control program to verify conformance with the regulatory requirements, and assure public health and safety and protection of the environment.

The NRC also requires licensed nuclear power plants, including Vermont Yankee, to continuously monitor the environment by establishing and implementing a Radiological Environmental Monitoring Program (REMP). In the case of Vermont Yankee, the REMP requires sampling and analysis of various environmental media, including air, water (i.e., Connecticut River, wells, and drinking water), river shoreline sediments and storm drain outfall sediments, locally produced milk, grasses, silage, and fish; and continuous measurement of the ambient radiation in the environment around the plant. The results of the REMP are reported annually; and the NRC regularly inspects the performance of the program to verify compliance and assure public health and safety and protection of the environment.

Since 1993, Vermont Yankee has not released any detectable radioactive liquid effluent to the Connecticut River. However, Vermont Yankee continues to make planned, monitored and controlled releases of gaseous radioactive effluents to the atmosphere as permitted by the NRC's regulations. For example, in 2000, Vermont Yankee released about 24 curies of radioactivity, mostly tritium, as gaseous effluent. Such low levels of radioactivity are typically not distinguishable from the normal background radiation in the environment.

In summary, Vermont Yankee has not dumped curium waste into the Connecticut River. NRC inspections of Vermont Yankee's control of radioactive effluents and implementation of its Radiological Environmental Monitoring Program continue to provide reasonable assurance of public health and safety and protection of the environment, including the Connecticut River.

We hope that this information is responsive to your concern. Should you have any further questions, please contact Mr. Joseph Furia, Senior Radiation Specialist, at (610) 337-5041.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Wayne D. Lanning, Director
Division of Reactor Safety

cc:

Richard Blumenthal, Attorney General, State of Connecticut

Ms. Molly Scott Lee

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