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FINAL REPLY:

Tom Gurdziel
Oswego, New York

TO:

Chairman Meserve

FOR SIGNATURE OF : ** GRN **

CRC NO: 02-0043

Norry, DEDM

DESC:

ROUTING:

Availability of Information on the Operational
Status of U.S. Nuclear Power Plants

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**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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AUTHOR: Tom Gurdziel
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ADDRESSEE: Richard Meserve
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9 Twin Orchard Drive
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January 16, 2002

Richard A. Meserve, Chairman
Greta Joy Dicus, Commissioner
Nils J. Diaz, Commissioner
Edward McGaffigan, Jr., Commissioner
Jeffrey S. Merrifield, Commissioner

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
One White Flint North
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852-2738

Dear Chairman and Commissioners:

I guess it was shortly after the terrorist attack on New York City when I started feeling less secure. You see, up to that time, I had available to me daily weekday information on the operational status of US nuclear power plants, including the three in my town. I had information from the NRC Headquarters report, and I had available event reports providing initial, yet extensive, information. These reports were available on the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission website by the 8 a.m. time I would look for them.

Assuming that most important U.S. nuclear plant events were reported, (an assumption that I did make,) I could feel comfortable when I would not see any out of the ordinary events described, especially for the plants in my state. That, however, is no longer the case. The Daily Report, the Headquarters Report, and the Event Reports are not presently available.

Here are three examples of information that used to be available.

A western plant has a massive pipe rupture of its fire water system. It takes about ½ hour for the plant operators to shut off the flow of water. Their event report states that the final water level was approximately elevation zero. A reader might assume that this was fortunate. However, if that same reader would read the Headquarters report about the same event a day or two later, there would be some surprising information provided. It turns out that elevation zero is about 16 feet above the floor!

My personal conclusion at that time was that the event had been described by the plant staff in a biased way. (I believe the ownership of this plant has been changed since that time.)

An eastern plant has a tube rupture in a steam generator. The plant's Emergency Plan has to be entered and agencies/people notified. (It is my recollection from some years ago that these notifications had to be made in 15 minutes.) Documents available on the NRC website state that (again, if I remember correctly,) once the State Police representative at the state Emergency Center was contacted, that person was put on "Hold" for 45 minutes before any useful information was conveyed.

I'm not even going to tell you what I thought about this, since this plant is in my state, even though it is not local. (The ownership of this plant has changed since then.)

A western plant has fire in multiple circuit breaker cubicles. The reactor is appropriately shut down and the turbine is "tripped." Now, although a tripped turbine is one that no longer has steam actively turning it, (the steam admission valves being closed or "tripped",) the lack of air resistance in the condenser allows prolonged spinning. This would not be a problem if lubricating oil was being provided to the turbine (and generator) bearings. In this case, lubricating oil could not be provided and extensive damage occurred.

My initial thought was that the failure to use condenser vacuum breakers to introduce air into the condenser to provide significant air resistance to spinning and thus slow down and stop the turbine much more quickly was not explained due to the multiple problems faced such as who was really in charge of fighting the fire and could a water stream (spray) be used to stop fire reignition. Then I realized that nobody even said that they had vacuum breakers on their condenser(s). My conclusion: if they had vacuum breakers on the plant, the operators were poorly trained if they did not use them; if they did not have vacuum breakers on the condenser(s) of this plant, the plant was poorly designed.

How did these three examples make me feel secure? The local plants have not reported extensive firewater flooding (at least that I recall.) I do not believe that I have seen serious discrepancies reported with the Emergency Plan/Organization for the local plants. It would not surprise me if all three local plants have condenser vacuum breakers: I know at least one used to have them.

So where is my problem? All three local plants have changed ownership and I have no current information on them. I don't feel so secure anymore. Please restore the Daily Report, the Headquarters Report (one day late, same as before), and the Event Reports as you provided previously.

Thank you,

Tom Gurdziel

Copy:

M. Sorbello, Chairman of the Legislature, Oswego County

Hon. C.E. Schumer

Hon. H.R. Clinton

Hon. J. McHugh

Hon. J.W. Wright

Hon. F. Sullivan