

July 30, 2003

Ms. Jill Lipoti
Assistant Director
Radiation Protection Programs
Division of Environmental Safety, Health and Analytical Programs
Department of Environmental Protection
P.O. Box 415
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0415

Dear Ms. Lipoti:

This letter is in response to your letter, dated July 8, 2003, regarding an exemption that was granted to AmerGen to extend the completion date for the licensed operator requalification training cycle from June 30, 2003, until December 31, 2003, at Oyster Creek. In your letter you expressed concern about the impact of a long term strike on the operating crews, and requested the NRC to conduct a special inspection of the modified operator requalification training program in the fall of 2003.

We understand your concerns related to the operating crews and agree that it is important for licensed operators to be proficient to provide an effective mitigative barrier in preventing or mitigating events. We plan to evaluate the licensee's process for training both the reactor operators coming back from the strike as they assume shift responsibilities and the senior reactor operators currently operating the plant. We will be using the existing guidance in the Reactor Oversight Process (ROP); and, in particular, Inspection Procedure (IP) 71111.11 which provides sufficient guidance to evaluate operator training during the strike.

As you are aware, we have been closely monitoring activities at Oyster Creek since the strike began. Following our initial around-the-clock coverage, the resident inspectors have continued to monitor the licensed operators' performance during normal and abnormal plant evolutions. This has provided us real time insights on operator performance issues. Regional management has also conducted site visits addressing, in particular, AmerGen's plans for retraining operators returning from off shift activities. Further, we supplemented the resident staff with regional inspectors to monitor the first cycle of the modified requalification program. Our inspections to date have found the training program to be adequate and appropriately focused on establishing and maintaining proficiency of the current crews.

We plan to continue observing licensed operator training as part of our continuing site coverage during the strike. We plan to supplement the resident staff, where appropriate, with regional inspectors to review licensed operator training. Prior to the strike, we had planned to perform the biennial portions of IP 71111.11. We still intend to conduct this inspection when the requalification exams are administered in the Fall/Winter 2003. Regional specialists will observe both the simulator and walk-through portions of the operating tests, as well as review some of the comprehensive written examinations. Additionally, we expect to monitor the training and evaluation of reactor operators who return from extended off-shift activities.

I trust that this letter has been responsive to your request. Please contact me if you have any further questions or concerns regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

/RA/ J. Wiggins for:

Hubert J. Miller
Regional Administrator

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