

November 9, 2004

The Honorable Rob Simmons  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Simmons:

On behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter dated February 26, 2004, to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs. Your letter forwarded correspondence from a constituent, Mayor Gerard Gaynor of New London, Connecticut, requesting that ground-to-air defense capability be installed to protect the Millstone Nuclear Power Station. I apologize for the untimely response. Unfortunately, your letter was processed by both the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy before it was forwarded to the NRC on August 17, 2004.

In response to Mayor Gaynor's request, installation of anti-aircraft defenses at U.S. nuclear power plant sites would present very difficult command and control issues, and the use of such weaponry could lead to significant collateral damage to plant workers and members of the public. Although the decision whether to deploy anti-aircraft capability must rest with the military, the NRC believes that the best approach to dealing with threats from aircraft is through strengthening airport and airline security measures. Efforts associated with enhancing security at airports and on airplanes themselves are an important part of reducing the threat from malevolent use of commercial aircraft for all civilian infrastructure, most of which does not have the robust capacity of a nuclear power plant. The NRC supports the steps taken to improve aircraft security, including enhanced passenger and baggage screening, strengthening of cockpit doors, the Air Marshal program and the federal flight deck officer program under the Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act. The U.S. intelligence community and various Federal law enforcement agencies have also increased efforts to identify potential terrorists and prevent potential attacks before they occur. For example, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Department of Defense (DOD) have acted to protect airspace above nuclear power plants from threats -- threats that were later judged to be non-credible.

Moreover, as part of a comprehensive review of security for NRC-licensed facilities, the NRC conducted detailed site-specific engineering studies of a limited number of nuclear power plants to assess potential vulnerabilities of deliberate attacks involving large commercial aircraft. In conducting these studies, the NRC drew on national experts from several DOE laboratories using state-of-the-art structural and fire analyses. The agency also enhanced its ability to predict accident progression and radiological consequences realistically. For the facilities analyzed, the vulnerability studies confirm that the likelihood of both damaging the reactor core

and releasing radioactivity that could affect public health and safety is low. Even in the unlikely event of a radiological release due to terrorist use of a large aircraft, there would be time to implement mitigating actions and offsite emergency plans such that the NRC's emergency planning basis remains valid. Additional site-specific studies of operating nuclear power plants are underway or being planned to determine the need, if any, for additional mitigating capability on a site-specific basis.

I hope that this adequately addresses the concerns raised by your constituent. If you have any additional questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

**/RA/**

Luis A. Reyes  
Executive Director  
for Operations

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