

August 24, 2012

The Honorable Robert Menendez
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Menendez:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of June 5, 2012, urging the Commission to fully consider requiring the installation of filtered containment vents at U.S. commercial nuclear power plants.

In a February 2012 paper on post-Fukushima follow-up actions, NRC staff recommended to the Commission a number of activities related to containment venting at Boiling Water Reactors (BWRs) with Mark I and Mark II containment designs. For the near term, the staff requested Commission approval to issue orders to require reliable hardened vents that assist in preventing core damage. The Commission approved these orders, which were issued to applicable reactor licensees on March 12, 2012.

With respect to the issue of *filtered* containment vents, the staff's February 2012 paper noted that there were technical and policy issues that needed to be resolved before any regulatory action could be taken to require licensees to install such vents. One policy issue centered on the consideration of whether containment vents, with or without filters, should be required to operate under severe accident conditions.

In April, the NRC sent a team of experts to Sweden and Switzerland to gain first-hand knowledge from countries that have installed filtered containment venting systems. The NRC team obtained detailed information about the design, construction, and regulatory basis for installing these systems. In addition, the NRC staff has proactively engaged members of the public, including many public interest groups, to listen to their concerns on this very important topic. Our staff is also assessing alternative approaches to filtered containment venting systems proposed by the nuclear power industry. Because more work remains to be done on this important issue, the NRC staff currently plans to submit the related policy paper for the Commission's consideration in late 2012.

I can assure you that, when the Commission receives the staff's recommendations related to the BWR Mark I and Mark II containment designs later this year, we will carefully consider the issue of requiring filtered containment vents. If you have any questions, please contact me or Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Allison M. Macfarlane