

412 Barrow  
Allison, MI 49224  
April 9, 1987

Senator Carl Levin  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Levin:

We're writing to urge you to support the efforts of the Union of Concerned Scientists to close these Babcock and Wilcox nuclear plants (which are relatives of the Three Mile Island plant where the worst accident in a U.S. commercial reactor occurred in the spring of 1979):

Three Mile Island Unit 1 near Harrisburg, PA  
David-Besse near Toledo, OH  
Rancho Seco near Sacramento, CA  
Arkansas Nuclear 1, Unit 1 near Russellville, AR  
Oconee Units 1, 2, and 3 near Greenville, SC  
Crystal River 3 near Crystal River, FL

Why should they be closed? The Nuclear Regulatory Commission and industry documents make it clear that these Babcock and Wilcox plants are particularly temperamental having a history of dangerous mishaps.

Moreover, for over a year the NRC has known that the changes it ordered at the B and W plants in the aftermath of Three Mile Island have proved insufficient to remedy problems with these reactors. A year ago (January 1986) the NRC began an enquiry into why the B and W plants were still experiencing so many accidents and near misses such as the event at Rancho Seco at 4 A.M., December 26, 1985. (Please see enclosed sheet for details.)

But the agency claimed, without any concrete analysis to

support its assertion, that the plants were safe enough to operate while the NRC was conducting the assessment of B & W facility problems. What's more, the NRC turned over the inquiry to the B & W Owners Groups, consisting of the utilities which operate B & W plants and the manufacturer of the reactor. This group has consistently argued that the plants are as safe as any other nuclear plant.

The integrity of the investigation having been seriously compromised, the Union of Concerned Scientists has begun legal action against the NRC. With the support of local citizens groups and concerned public officials, UCS has petitioned the NRC to suspend temporarily the licenses of the eight operating B & W reactors until the regulators can demonstrate they're safe.

UCS has successfully used the citizen petition process before in dealing with the NRC; they succeeded in opening an inquiry into the safety of the Indian Point nuclear plants and forced the NRC to adopt more stringent fire protection rules.

For the UCS to succeed in this petition effort, the NRC must be persuaded that this issue is of public concern. Are you willing to support the UCS effort, Mr. Levin?

Thank you for considering our letter.

Sincerely,

Dr. & Mrs. Bob Messer

(Copies to ~~Senator Carl Levin~~ Rep. Howard Wolpe  
and Senator Donald Riegle)

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Details on Rancho Seco, a sister of Three Mile Island Unit 2:

At 4 A.M. on the day after Christmas, 1985, this plant located near Sacramento, CA, experienced a chilling accident. It began with a loss of power to the Integrated Control System, an array of electronic gear designed to keep the various components of the plant working together smoothly.

Once the facility's control system went down, plant operators worked furiously to try to get the plant back in balance. The malfunctioning control system blocked the operators' ability to control the reactor. During the accident, a senior reactor operator collapsed at the control panel and was rushed to the hospital where he was treated for stress and exhaustion.

In the course of trying to get the plant under control, operators sent a burst of cold water into the reactor, which was still under high pressure. The combination of the cold water and high pressure threatened to rupture the steel vessel that is the first line of defense against a major release of dangerous radioactivity.

According to the NRC's analysis of the accident, if it had gone on another 90 minutes, the reactor vessel could have cracked. That could have led to a nuclear disaster as great as the tragedy that struck the Soviet reactor at Chernobyl.