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COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS
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COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 31, 1979

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Honorable Joseph M. Hendrie
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Chairman Hendrie:

I am writing in reference to the latest "incident" at Three Mile Island, involving the discharge of 4,000 gallons of Unit I wastewater into the Susquehanna River.

The basic facts of the episode certainly gave the impression that Met-Ed had once again violated NRC regulations by dumping this water after being told that additional testing was to be done. However, my preliminary analysis of the details points to the NRC itself as the culprit in this incident.

Apparently, Met-Ed had in fact done the testing of the water to be discharged in accordance with their technical specifications. However, they had not done the gross beta analysis which NRC inspectors had suggested be done given the possibility of higher-than-normal strontium 90 levels in the water. When it was learned that Met-Ed had dumped water without having done this test, NRC ordered that the dumping be stopped. As it turns out, the advisability of conducting a gross beta analysis was merely the subject of a conversation between NRC representatives and the operating staff of Unit II, and the substance of that conversation was never relayed to the operating staff of the undamaged Unit I, whose water it was that was discharged.

I am astounded that the NRC would not have made known its opinion on the matter of the beta analysis through a formal memorandum to the operating staffs of BOTH reactors, if they really intended for it to apply to the undamaged reactor as well, which it certainly should have. In addition, I am astounded that the Commission would not have made some provision for monitoring the utility company's compliance with this procedure. I might also point out that this information was received from the NRC staff itself.

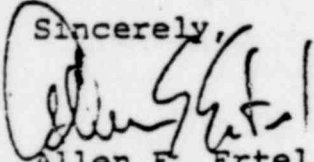
This example of the communications problems between the Commission and reactor staffs is unsettling to say the least. It is particularly inexcusable when it could have resulted in a major assault on the public health; fortunately, it ap-

HONORABLE JOSEPH M. HENDRIE
July 31, 1979
page 2

years that it did not, but the public cannot be expected to continue to tolerate these mishaps which have the potential for endangering their health.

I took great pains to develop the chronology of events leading up to the discharge, and to reserve judgment until I had carefully examined all the facts. I certainly do not wish to be required to be a fact-finder, but it appears that someone has to improve their performance. At this point and on this issue, the only conclusion I can draw is that the responsibility for this mix-up rests with the Commission, and I think an explanation is due Congress. I look forward to your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Allen E. Ertel
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

AEE/nb

cc: Commissioner Victor Gilinsky
Commissioner Richard Kennedy
Commissioner Peter Bradford
Commissioner Richard Ahearne

Mr. John T. Collins

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