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WILLIAM D. HARRINGTON  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
NUCLEAR

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50-293

Mr. Harold Denton  
United States Nuclear Regulatory  
Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Denton:

I don't know if the editorial which appeared in the August 26, 1983 edition of the Boston Globe was brought to your attention so I am enclosing a copy. I believe it is accurate and describes our efforts during those hectic weeks.

I wish, again, to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which the matter was handled.

Sincerely,

*W D Harrington*  
William D. Harrington

WDH/mg  
Enclosure

*Acc'd  
1/1  
Add: H. Denton*

## Sensible regulation

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has shown an appropriate level of concern coupled with practical judgment in setting out a varied timetable for potential replacement of major piping in five nuclear power plants, including Boston Edison's Pilgrim I plant in Plymouth.]

Originally worried about unexpectedly deep cracks appearing in boiling water plants built by General Electric, the NRC staff had called for immediate shutdown and inspection of the plants last month. On appeal by the utilities, the NRC agreed to temporary postponement to allow for plant-by-plant evaluations of the risks involved, short of direct inspection of the pipes themselves, possible only during a shutdown.

In the case of the Edison plant, shutdown was scheduled for January in any event to permit refueling and routine maintenance. The NRC has now deemed a Dec. 10 shutdown adequate in terms of its safety concerns. While the NRC does not include economic issues in making such decisions, the fact is that continued operation until the December date will spare New Englanders the additional costs of more expensive fossil fuels, primarily oil, in generating electricity.]

Cracks have been discovered in 12 of 17 plants inspected so far, requiring repairs ranging from welding to the placing of heavy jackets around the suspect areas to complete replacement of the piping, which carries superheated

water from the reactor to steam generators. In the case of Edison, complete replacement, coupled with the additional costs of fossil fuel, would run about \$50 million, Edison says.

Heightened concern about the piping has already alerted plant operating personnel to the need for special monitoring of the plants against irregularities in the way the plant works. Edison has imposed tighter standards for plant shutdowns in the case of greater-than-permitted rates of leakage into sumps at the plant's base. Other operators have already decided to shut some plants for total replacement of the suspect piping.

The significant adjustment made by the NRC in dealing with the current problem is a change from a blanket rule to a case-by-case judgment. Shifts of this sort offer better assurance to the public and to operators that regulation reflects closer attention to plants as they actually operate.]

With only 75 functioning nuclear plants in the country today, the NRC is in a position to pay close attention to detailed aspects of their conditions and the way they run. American nuclear operators have a highly mixed reputation and foreign engineers have commented repeatedly in the past on the comparatively low level of training for personnel in this country. The NRC ruling is one more reminder of the need for very high levels of competence and tight procedures for running such plants.]

① Boston Globe  
8/26/83