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Nuclear Information and Resource Service

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DOCKETED
JUN 15 1983

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H Street, N.W. 11th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20555

June 14, 1983
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Nunzio J. Palladino, Chairman
Victor Gilinsky, Commissioner
Thomas M. Roberts, Commissioner
John F. Ahearne, Commissioner
James Asselstine, Commissioner

Gentlemen:

The Commission is reported to be under considerable pressure to restart the Three Mile Island 1 nuclear power plant. This pressure is unfortunate, as it may tend to obscure the painful lessons learned from the TMI 2 accident. The Nuclear Information and Resource Service urges the Commission not to reopen TMI 1 until all significant issues have been resolved.

William Dircks' recent memo to you on the issue of GPU Nuclear management explicitly refrains from endorsing GPU's actions pending resolution of many issues: federal investigation of leak rates coverup, allegations of improper procedures involving recent TMI 2 cleanup activities, and two consultants' studies of reactor operations and management were cited. The range of issues still to be resolved is broad - encompassing not only improper management but also plant structural integrity (the recent steam generator repair) - with potentially momentous impacts on plant operations. In all probability, it will take significant additional efforts to overcome these problems. Therefore, NIRS urges you to withhold your approval of a premature restart. Even under normal plant circumstances, systems fail and errors are made. The added level of uncertainty that now exists at TMI 1 can only mean that this plant is more than usually vulnerable to failure.

TMI 1 is inevitably a test case. It could highlight careful and responsible NRC regulation, and reassure the public that lessons have been learned and implemented with regard to both safe power plant operation and oversight. Or it could just as easily provide a tragic example of inadequate regulation and inability to learn from past mistakes.

While it is our understanding that the Commission is not legally required to further delay the restart of TMI 1, matters of this significance and complexity should transcend narrow legal boundaries. Many concerned citizens around the country are watching your actions now. They demand nothing less than your most prudent and principled action. TMI should not be permitted to restart unless and until there is absolute assurance that this plant will be safely operated and maintained.

Sincerely,

Kit Gage

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Reactor Safety Project

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