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May 10, 1984

Nunzio J. Palladino, Chairman
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H Street, NW - Room 114
Washington, DC 20555

TICKET NUMBER

50-271

RE: Docket No. 50-271/Vermont Yankee/
VPIRG/VYDA 2.206 Petition - 10/25/83

(2.206)

Dear Chairman Palladino:

On October 25, 1983, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) and the Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance (VYDA) submitted a petition, pursuant to 10 CFR 2.206, to the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requesting that the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation (VYBPC) be required to show cause why its operating license for the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant (VYNPP) should not be suspended. VPIRG and VYDA asked that the licensee be ordered to take essential actions to address the Intergranular Stress Corrosion Cracking (IGSCC) problem at the VYNPP and to provide reasonable assurance that the facility could be operated safely.

The petition asserted that inspections performed at the plant by the VYNPC were inadequate because the licensee used an unreliable Ultrasonic Technique (UT) testing method and a consultant Magnaflux, Inc., that had performed inadequately in simulated testing studies (See EPCI - 1570 - 2, August 4, 1983) for determining IGSCC indication size. The groups also contended that responses to inspection results, such as weld overlay repairs, were insufficient because they were based on unproven data. Additionally, they pointed out that the NRC staff and the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards were in disagreement about the implications of the pipe cracking problem and the reliability of UT testing at Boiling Water Reactors (BWR's) which created serious questions about the nuclear industry's management of the problem

Harold Denton, the Director of the NRC Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation denied the petition in a letter dated April 16, 1984. He concluded that, "no adequate basis exists to take the requested action at this time." In waiting nearly six months to rule on the VPIRG/VYDA petition, Mr. Denton failed to fulfill the intent of 10 CFR 2.206 (b) which states that the Director of the NRR, "shall institute...or shall advise...within a reasonable time..."

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VPIRG and VYDA believe that there are sufficient grounds to require a show cause proceeding on the VYNPP operating license. Although they are well aware that 10 CFR 2.206 (e)(2) precludes an appeal, per se, of the Director's decision, they ask that the Commission institute a review on their own volition of NRC and nuclear industry management of the IGSCC problem because current policies have not dealt effectively with this important issue. Moreover, the consequences for nuclear safety and economics are likely to be severely adverse due to the mishandling of these problems. A review of the decision in this case would be, of course, a necessary component of the Commission's review.

Pipe cracking at the nation's BWR's currently affects at least 18 of 23 older operating units. Despite the fact that it has been common knowledge for decades that non-conforming stainless steel material is prone to IGSCC, most plants continue to operate with substantial portions of their Primary Pressure Boundry Systems containing corrosion susceptible metals.

Many of these plants have known damaged primary cooling components; and measures taken by industry to mitigate the hazards posed by leaving these compromised systems in service, thereby justifying continued operations, such as by the installation of leak detection equipment and relying on the unproven "leak-before-break" theory, do not provide a reasonable assurance of safety.


The only sensible course would be to require replacement of non-conforming metals with low-carbon materials designed to be IGSCC-resistant. Although many NRC staff members have recommended this approach, top management has been reluctant to take this important step. Instead they have continued to recommend more incomplete and unreliable repairs which are both risky and costly.

In the case of the VYNPP, economy and safety walk hand-in-hand because early replacement is the cheapest, as well as the only proven method of assuring system reliability. In Vermont, for example, it will cost the utilities at least \$17 million more in replacement power costs alone to replace the Recirculation and Residual Heat Removal System in the current September 1985 schedule, than if the work was performed this summer--due to interium actions, power supply and inflation considerations, according to the Vermont Department of Public Service.

Finally, we believe that the situation is too important for the Commissioners to rely wholly on staff recommendations. A review of the comments made by the Commissioners at meetings with the NRC staff on IGSCC concerns, shows occasions (e.g. November 9) when members were dissatisfied with staff handling of the issue. That concern should be followed to its natural conclusion. Clearly, a more thorough review is needed.

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Respectfully submitted,

Cort Richardson 

Cort Richardson
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