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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

June 24, 1971

Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg
Chairman
Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D. C. 20545

Dear Dr. Seaborg:

Given the ever-present worry about nuclear power plant safety and the constant threat of power shortages to which the citizens of New Jersey have been subjected, recent newspaper articles on the failure of emergency cooling systems for atomic reactors naturally concern me.

As you are aware, the Washington Post, on May 28th, reported that "test failures of an emergency cooling system for atomic reactors" may force the Commission to "curtail the electrical output of twenty-two nuclear power plants in twelve states". Furthermore, it was reported that five utilities were informed that they can expect delays in obtaining licenses to build and operate their power plants because of this fundamental design problem.

I would appreciate learning how these core-cooling failures will affect the nuclear power plant presently operating at Oyster Creek, New Jersey, and the five other plants presently being constructed, or now planned, for New Jersey. Will the lowering of the core temperatures allow the affected plants to maintain the margin of safety as is employed in power plants operating in normal situations. Should the margin of safety be increased by lowering even further the core operating temperatures to compensate for this defect?

Will this proposed reduction of power output in twenty-two plants affect other plants forming the PJM Interconnection, of which New Jersey plants are member? Also, will the licensing delays for the five facilities affect this same "power pool"?

Rec'd (in) Dir. of Reg. E/27
Date 6/29/71
Time 10:00

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Dr. Glenn T. Seabor
June 24, 1971
Page 2.

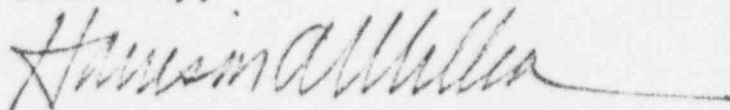
I note that, in an address on May 17th, George A. Lincoln, Chairman of the Joint Board on Fuel Supply and Fuel Transport, reported that "a reserve margin of 20% of expected peak loads is considered generally necessary..." and then pointed out that the PJM Interconnection would have a reserve of 15.4% this summer, an inadequate and possibly over-optimistic figure. Would the reduction in generating capacity implied by these problems seriously hamper the ability of facilities in New Jersey, and within the PJM "pool", to handle effectively the heavy power demands that can be reasonably expected during the coming summer days? Certainly, any delays in plant construction can affect their ability to meet long-range power expectations and would necessitate revised planning for viable alternatives to nuclear power generation.

Finally, assuming that the newly-announced safety requirements remain in effect throughout the summer, in the event that power reserves fail to satisfy consumer demands and load shedding is contemplated, would these affected plants be allowed to operate at full generating capacity to meet the extraordinary need? Naturally, I am concerned that over-all, long-range public safety not be sacrificed rashly, in the face of the present situation, to satisfy short-term requests.

Your prompt attention to these inquiries will be greatly appreciated.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,



Harrison A. Williams, Jr.

HAW:rdbb