



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

AUG 07 1979

Docket Nos. STN 50-522  
STN 50-523

Mr. Robert Miles, Secretary  
Sierra Club of Western Canada  
2342 Queens Avenue  
West Vancouver  
British Columbia, Canada V7V2Y6

Dear Mr. Miles:

This is in response to your letter of July 17, 1979, to Chairman Hendrie regarding your concerns about the proposed Skagit Nuclear Power Project to be located in Skagit County, Washington. Since the decisions and rulings promulgated by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board regarding the Skagit proceeding are subject to review by the Chairman and the Commissioners, it would be inappropriate for Chairman Hendrie to respond to inquiries regarding matters pertinent to the record of that proceeding. Accordingly, I have been asked to respond to your letter.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), in discharging its responsibility under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 and the mandate of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 conducts, as part of the licensing process, comprehensive safety and environmental reviews of each nuclear power plant prior to issuance of a construction permit or an operating license. In this regard, the staff thoroughly evaluates the environmental effects of the proposed plant, prepares a draft environmental impact statement, and solicits comments from appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies and the public. All comments received are considered in detail and appropriate revisions are reflected in a final environmental statement which is submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency (at the time of the Skagit FES, it was to the Council on Environmental Quality) and made available to the general public.

While the environmental review is in progress, other members of the NRC staff are reviewing the safety aspects of the application. This review results in a detailed safety evaluation report which is made available to the public and is reviewed by the independent Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS). The ACRS furnishes its advice on the safety of the reactor in a written report to the NRC which becomes a part of the public record.

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Before construction permits can be issued, an evidentiary public hearing is held before an Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) who develop a factual record regarding health and safety as well as environmental aspects of the proposed plant. Interested parties may submit written statements to the ASLB to be entered into the hearing record; they may appear to give direct statements as limited participants in the hearing; or they may petition for leave to intervene as full participants in the hearing, thereby being granted the right of cross-examining all direct testimony in the proceeding. Following completion of the hearing, the ASLB issues a decision as to whether or not construction permits should be granted, along with any conditions which must be imposed for protection of the health and safety of the public and for protection of the environment. Such hearings have been going on since July 1975, and have not yet been completed.

Your letter implies that the proposed plant could be subjected to an earthquake severe enough to disrupt the facility and, presumably as a result of the disruption, a large release of radioactivity to the environment could occur. Geologic and seismic review of the region by the NRC and the U.S. Geological Survey has been extensive and is continuing at this time. The purpose of this review is to determine the appropriate design basis for safe shutdown of the facility in the event of a large earthquake. We expect to complete this determination soon and will present our conclusions to the ASLB in hearings this fall.

With regard to accident evaluation, conservative assumption is made that there is a release from the reactor pressure vessel of fission products contained in the nuclear core. This assumption is used in forming the design bases for the engineered safety measures which are physically incorporated in the power plant to mitigate the consequences of any postulated accident. Some of the safety systems which are typically incorporated in the plant design to contain these fission products are primary and secondary containment, containment sprays, and effluent treatment systems. Prior to licensing a nuclear power plant, the NRC staff must be satisfied that the individual doses received by the public at specified distances from the facility following a design basis accident (i.e., fission product release from the reactor pressure vessel) are within the guideline values contained in 10 CFR Part 100.

Information relative to our consideration of the Skagit Project can be found in the enclosed copies of the Safety Evaluation Report and the Final Environmental

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Statement related to its construction. I am also enclosing a pamphlet entitled "Licensing of Nuclear Power Reactors" which describes the entire licensing process.

I hope this information will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

Original signed by  
Roger J. Mattson

Harold R. Denton, Director  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosures:

1. FES
2. SER
3. "Licensing of Nuclear  
Power Reactors"