



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

January 31, 1997

The Honorable Andrea L. Stillman
Connecticut House of Representatives
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Ms. Stillman:

I am responding to your letter of October 28, 1996, to President Clinton which was referred to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for response. In your letter, you expressed concerns about the NRC's oversight of aging nuclear power plants, the effectiveness of the NRC, and the safe storage of high-level nuclear waste on a permanent basis.

With respect to your concern regarding aging nuclear power plants, the NRC has performed studies to investigate issues involving plant aging. For the most part, all these studies find that the regulatory process has been and will continue to be successful in dealing with degradation and aging issues. In the early 1980s the NRC recognized the potential impact of plant aging phenomena on the continued safe operation of nuclear power plants and focused its attention on how to best identify and resolve the various technical issues relating to plant aging. In 1985, the NRC established the Nuclear Plant Aging Research (NPAR) program plan to investigate the phenomena of plant aging. With industry interest in plant life extension increasing, the NRC established a Technical Integration Review Group for Aging and Life Extension (TIRGALEX), which subsequently identified issues related to systems, structures, and components that are susceptible to aging and that could have a negative effect on safety; degradation processes; testing, surveillance, and maintenance requirements; and requirements for evaluating residual life. TIRGALEX concluded that many aging phenomena are readily managed and do not pose major technical safety issues not only for the current operating term, but also for a period of extended operation, provided that necessary compensatory measures are effectively implemented. Although the TIRGALEX effort has been concluded and the NPAR program is virtually complete, the NRC continues to systematically study the safety of our aging nuclear power plants in support of operating plant maintenance and plant life extension activities. These efforts look at the most recent operating experience, technical reports submitted by industry, and continuing research generated by the NPAR program. Evidence to date from these efforts indicates that there are no new aging issues that are not currently being addressed by the regulatory process.

With respect to the effectiveness of the NRC, we rely on inspection and plant assessment programs to identify adverse trends in safety performance of nuclear power plants in the United States. On the bases of inspection program

9702060073 970131
PDR STPRG ESGCT
PDR

060001

IDAR-5 Nuclear Plant AGEING
NRC FILE CENTER COPY

results, plant performance reviews, and other evaluation mechanisms, including a Senior Management Meeting review process, the NRC can take appropriate action to protect public health and safety.

Although the overall safety performance of U.S. commercial reactors during the 1990s has been good and generally continues to improve, recent events at several operating reactors underscore a need for heightened concern and regulatory improvement. Certain NRC assessments have found that plant deficiencies may be influenced by two closely related considerations, economic pressure to be a low-cost energy producer and lack of a questioning attitude, the latter a necessary component of a proper safety culture. With closer examination of warning signs of declining performance, and with more regulatory focus at an earlier stage, the NRC should be able to focus licensee attention on effective and timely corrective actions, before the situation has declined to an unacceptable status. NRC organizational and procedural changes are now being considered and, in some cases, implemented to better diagnose and respond to declining trends in licensee safety performance.

Another area the NRC will improve is design-basis inspections. Recent experience shows that the NRC stopped doing design-basis inspections too soon, relying instead on the nuclear power industry to address problems with conformance to the licensing basis and maintaining proper design control. The NRC must, and does, rely on the nuclear industry because licensees have the primary responsibility for the safe operation of their facilities. However, it is our responsibility to regulate, to set appropriate safety requirements, and to insist upon compliance with existing requirements. In this regard, NRC staff is returning to an increased use of inspections to review actual design-basis documentation and its use in plant modifications and operation. We have requested submissions from all operating reactor licensees regarding their plant design control programs and will use this information in planning these inspections.

In a broader context, the NRC is presently engaged in a Strategic Assessment and Rebaselining of all NRC activities. A principal outcome of this process will be a new strategic plan that will establish a framework to guide future NRC decision-making. A key strategic issue is the Operating Reactor Oversight Program and the Role of the Industry. Although the Commission is currently considering these issues, the Commission's preliminary view is that the NRC should continue its ongoing comprehensive review to identify any areas that need to be strengthened. This would entail developing mechanisms to provide for a systematic reexamination of the reactor oversight program to ensure its continued effectiveness.

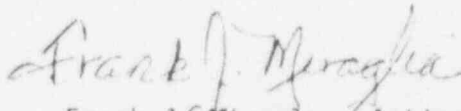
You expressed concern regarding the resolution of the safe storage of high-level radioactive waste on a permanent basis and that temporary onsite storage at nuclear plants has been going on far too long. As directed by Congress, the Department of Energy (DOE) is investigating whether it is feasible to construct a disposal facility for high-level nuclear waste deep underground at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. The NRC is providing regulatory oversight to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. Even though a license

application for a repository will not be submitted before 2002, we are already working closely with DOE to identify potential safety issues and steps needed to resolve them. On the basis of what we know today, a deep geologic repository seems to be a technically feasible solution to the problem of permanently disposing of spent fuel and other high-level radioactive waste in the United States.

Until a repository for safe disposal becomes available, the Commission has found that there is reasonable assurance that high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel will continue to be managed in a safe manner. The Commission also found that there is reasonable assurance that spent fuel generated at reactors can, if necessary, be stored safely and without significant environmental impact for at least 30 years beyond the expiration of the currently-licensed reactors' operating licenses in the reactors' spent fuel storage basin, or in either onsite or offsite independent spent fuel storage installations.

I hope this information is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,



Frank J. Miraglia, Acting Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

cc: Ms. Sue J. Smith
Director, Agency Liaison
Room 6, OEOB
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Distribution:

Central File (w/original incoming)

PUBLIC (w/incoming)

EDO#970001

EDO R/F

HThompson, EDO

EJordan, EDO

JBlaha, EDO

PNorry, EDO

HMiller, RI

CPaperiello, NMSS 0-A23

FMiraglia, NRR

ATHadani, NRR

RZimmerman, NRR

BSheron, NRR 0-7D26

WTravers, NMSS 0-6F18

TMartin, NRR

DMatthews, NRR

PMilano, NRR

KBohrer, NRR 0-12G18

SNewberry, NRR

RJohnson, NMSS

JGreeves, NMSS

OGC

OPA

SECY #970001

NRR Mailroom - (EDO970001 w/incoming) 0-12G18

NOLson, NRR 0-12G18

BSweeney, NRR

RAnand, NRR (w/incoming)

EHyton, NRR

PDLR R/F

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

12-20-96

DATE

MEMORANDUM

FOR:

NRCC

FROM:

SUE J. SMITH
DIRECTOR, AGENCY LIAISON

SUBJECT:

REFERRAL OF CASEWORK

I am forwarding the attached letter to your office for appropriate action. Please send us a copy of your written response or your telephone report along with the writer's original correspondence and envelope to the following address:

Ms. Sue J. Smith
Director, Agency Liaison
Room 6, OEOB
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

If you have any questions, call my office at 202/456-7486.

Thank you for your help.

47011300353p



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 4000
HARTFORD, CONN. 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE ANDREA L. STILLMAN

THIRTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT

5 COOLIDGE COURT
WATERFORD, CONNECTICUT 06385
TELEPHONE
HOME (203) 443-8568
CAPITOL (860) 240-8585
TOLL FREE 1-800-842-8267

VICE CHAIR
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

MEMBER
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

October 28, 1996

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet you on October 7, in Stamford, Connecticut at the Business Leaders Forum. It was an honor to be a part of that event and chat with you for a moment.

I am one of the small business owners in Connecticut that supports your business initiatives, as well as a member of the Connecticut General Assembly, and running for re-election on your ticket.

When we met I handed you one of my cards with some notes about the concerns we have in Connecticut in reference to the safety of our 4 nuclear energy power plants, 3 of them are in my legislative district and all of them are on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission watch list.

I understand that all the nuclear plants are being scrutinized by the NRC, under the direction of Dr. Shirley Jackson, who toured our plants and met with the public on August 6, 1995. She made it clear that she is making changes at the NRC under her new leadership and we were encouraged by her visit.

Be that as it may, there are concerns that the NRC and the nuclear power industry have been too cozy and the NRC has created many of the problems by not being objective and scrutinizing the power plants more closely.

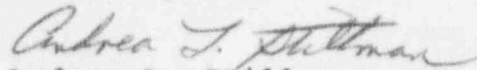
The Honorable William J. Clinton
October 24, 1996
Page 2

Also, as the plants are being decommissioned over the next 10 years one unplanned immediately, the issue of the permanent storage of high level nuclear waste must be addressed and resolved now. The temporary on site storage at the nuclear plants has been going on far too long.

I am urging you to place high on your priority list a study of the safety of our aging nuclear energy plants; the effectiveness of the NRC; and a resolution of how we can safely store our high level nuclear waste on a permanent basis. I know you are threatening to veto the latest bill on permanent storage if it comes to your desk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Andrea L. Stillman
State Representative

ALS/bcm

You expressed concern regarding the resolution of the safe storage of high-level radioactive waste on a permanent basis and that temporary onsite storage at nuclear plants has been going on far too long. As directed by Congress, the Department of Energy (DOE) is investigating whether it is feasible to construct a disposal facility for high-level nuclear waste deep underground at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. The NRC is providing regulatory oversight to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. Even though a license application for a repository will not be submitted before 2002, we are already working closely with DOE to identify potential safety issues and steps needed to resolve them. On the basis of what we know today, a deep geologic repository seems to be a technically feasible solution to the problem of permanently disposing of spent fuel and other high-level radioactive waste in the United States.

Until a repository for safe disposal becomes available, the Commission has found that there is reasonable assurance that high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel will continue to be managed in a safe manner. The Commission also found that there is reasonable assurance that spent fuel generated at reactors can, if necessary, be stored safely and without significant environmental impact for at least 30 years beyond the expiration of the currently-licensed reactors' operating licenses in the reactors' spent fuel storage basin, or in either onsite or offsite independent spent fuel storage installations.

I hope this information is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Frank J. Miraglia

Frank J. Miraglia, Acting Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

cc: Ms. Sue J. Smith
Director, Agency Liaison
Room 6, OE0B
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

DOCUMENT NAME: A:\GT97001.LTR Distribution (see next page)

*SEE PREVIOUS CONCURRENCE

To receive a copy of this document, indicate in the box: "C" = Copy without enclosures "E" = Copy with enclosures "N" = No copy

OFFICE	PM:PDLR	LA:PDLR	D:PDLR	TECH ED*	DD:DRPM*
NAME	RANAND:avl	EHYLTON	SNEWBERRY	RSaunders	DMATTHEWS
DATE	01/ /97	01/ /97	01/ /97	01/09/97	01/09/97
OFFICE	D:DRPM*	ADPR:NRR*	D:NRR	EDO	OCA
NAME	TMARTIN	ATHADANI	FMIRAGLIA	HTHOMPSON	SJackson
DATE	01/10/97	01/13/97	01/14/97	01/17/97	01/31/97

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY

1/13
#3