

JOHN KERRY  
MASSACHUSETTS

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 1996

Shirley Ann Jackson, Ph.D  
Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
10555 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Dr. Jackson:

I am writing today about the new and apparently lower standards of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for maintenance of nuclear power plants and, in particular, the safety risks that accompany so-called on-line maintenance practices that the maintenance standards permit. As you know, on-line maintenance is the trend at many nuclear power plants across the nation, including the Seabrook Power Plant. I am particularly concerned that this practice continues even as inspections are slated to be decreased at the Seabrook plant, a subject about which I wrote to you last week. In that letter, I expressed serious concerns about a decision to conduct fewer inspections at Seabrook. Compounding the concern is the fact that one of the utilities which now owns Seabrook, Northeast Utilities, has been cited for numerous safety violations at its other New England nuclear power facilities.

Recent news reports indicate that the primary motivation for reducing refueling and maintenance outages -- in part by conducting maintenance while the plant is still on-line -- is to reduce costs at the nuclear plants. However, it is my understanding that preventive maintenance of this type conducted during power operation often involves shutting down critical emergency or back-up systems of the nuclear plant. I am very troubled by reports of on-line maintenance by licensees, like Northeast Utilities, without the proper understanding and evaluation of potential safety impacts, and I am told that similar concerns have been expressed by senior NRC officials.

Massachusetts citizens should not be subjected to greater safety risks in order to increase the profits of nuclear power plant licensees, especially utility owners who are now dealing with serious safety violations at other sites. For that reason, I respectfully request that the NRC either reconsider its policy of allowing on-line maintenance or provide me with immediate assurances that plant safety is not compromised.

I look forward to your response on this important matter and to continuing to work with you to assure that our nuclear energy facilities operate safely.

Sincerely,

JOHN F. KERRY

United States Senate

9/18..To EDO to Prepare Response  
for Chairman's Signature..Date  
due Cmm: Oct 3..Cpy to: Chairman, Comps  
OGC, RF, OCA to Ack...96-0996

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PDR COMMS NRCC  
CORRESPONDENCE PDR