

29 FEB 1988

Mr. Habern Freeman
Harford County Executive
County Council of Harford County, Maryland
20 West Courtland Street
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

Dear Mr. Freeman:

This letter is in response to your January 22, 1988 letter in which you expressed concerns regarding the Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station. In that letter you requested our opinion regarding the potential for failure of the Peach Bottom containment in the event of a severe accident and deficiencies in management control at the plant.

With regard to the first item, results of NRC sponsored research indicate that there are some low probability severe accident sequences for which the integrity of the Peach Bottom containment could be seriously challenged. The studies indicate that the severe accident conditions for which containment failure is predicted have a very low probability of occurrence and the overall risk of plant operation satisfies the safety goals established by the Commission. Nonetheless, the containment is a principal element in terms of the defense-in-depth philosophy applied to nuclear power plant design and operation, and the Commission has assigned high priority to the assessment of methods for improving containment reliability under postulated severe accident conditions. The NRC Offices of Research and Nuclear Reactor Regulation are currently performing studies in this area.

The Commission's goal is to minimize the overall risk of plant operation and a careful, methodical approach must be used in addressing the containment issue. Care must be taken not to require changes that might reduce risk in one area while causing risk to increase disproportionately in another area. Also, in terms of reducing overall plant risk, the most effective use of resources may be in reducing the probability of initiating events. Attachment I describes the NRC Mark I Containment Performance Program Plan. This program is being implemented on a high priority basis and I believe will provide a firm and timely basis for deciding an appropriate course of action. An interim report on these activities is due to the Commission in April 1988. This report will address differences in existing risk studies and indicate whether existing analyses justify changes in the Mark I containment systems or operating procedures in the near term. A final report to the Commission is scheduled for August 1988. In summary, based on existing studies, the calculated failure probability for the Peach Bottom containment in the event of certain severe accident scenarios does not in itself constitute an unacceptable risk to the public health and safety. Nonetheless, the Commission, consistent with its defense in depth philosophy, is pursuing methods for improving containment reliability and reducing overall risk.

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We too are concerned about the management controls at Peach Bottom. This was an important factor in shutting the plant down in 1987. Your second concern gave some examples of the types of problems of a recurring nature which we have identified. We met with PECO to discuss some of these problems in the Health Physics and Security areas on February 26, 1988. Our review of the PECO response to the shutdown order continues following PECO's February 12, 1988 submittal of section 2 of the restart plan. We will be holding additional public meetings to receive your specific comments before we conclude that review.

An identical letter is being sent to Councilwoman Barbara A. Risacher.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By
WILLIAM T. RUSSELL
William T. Russell
Regional Administrator

Attachment:
As Stated

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