

Sept. 28, 2004

To The Plain Dealer Editor:

An Impending Disaster ... Not

I must respond to your editorial of 9/23, "Straight talk, please," and provide proper context for the quotes you used. In speaking to the NRC's 2003 Regulatory Information Conference, I said the following:

"A hole in the head of the reactor was an enormous failure on the part of the licensee and of the NRC. I want to say that loud and clear. ... I want to say equally loudly and clearly that it was not close to being the impending disaster publicly portrayed. It may be asked, aren't those two statements inconsistent? They are not. In this case, our preliminary analysis indicates that the stainless steel liner of the vessel head, thin as it was, was more than adequate to contain the pressure generated within, and it would have done so for quite a while."

Today we know that the liner was adequate to contain pressure for a period after the discovery of the problem. My 2003 comments also addressed the potential failure of the liner and are needed to give the public the complete picture. I went on to say:

"The reactor cooling systems, the emergency core cooling systems, and the containment systems, combined with operator's actions, procedures, and emergency plans, constitute a multi-faceted defense to protect the public."

The main thought in my statement, that the public has been and would have been protected, remains true today. In fact, not one member of the public has been injured from the operation or, or from events or an accident at a nuclear power plant in the United States.

In the case of Davis-Besse, we determined that the pressure vessel head corrosion rates as a very significant accident precursor. That problem was aggressively addressed after its discovery and much has been changed to prevent a recurrence. Yes, we missed it, but it was not an accident. I am convinced that if the liner had been breached, the layers of safety would have protected the people of Ohio, and that is the bottom line.

In addition, your editorial is mistaken in saying the Davis-Besse analysis has been "hidden even from Congress." The full analysis is available to Congress.

The NRC is committed to ensuring that all the lessons learned here are applied to raise the level of nuclear plant safety across America. In the case of Davis-Besse, the NRC made certain that the plant stayed closed until we were satisfied the owners could proceed safely.

In regard to completing recommendations made in the Davis-Besse report, we moved promptly to take the necessary actions at all installations and will continue to do so, efficiently and effectively. Changes have been made in how the NRC communicates internally and externally.

Allow me to repeat myself loudly and clearly: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has exercised its mandate to protect the health and safety of our people.

Nils J. Diaz
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission