

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
2304 RAYBURN BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-2076

<http://www.house.gov/gejdenson/>  
bozrah@mail.house.gov

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
2 COURTHOUSE SQUARE, 5TH FLOOR  
P.O. Box 2000  
NORWICH, CT 06360  
(860) 886-0139

84 COURT STREET  
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457  
(860) 346-1123



SAM GEJDENSON  
2D DISTRICT  
CONNECTICUT

RANKING MEMBER  
COMMITTEE ON  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 13, 1999

The Honorable Richard Meserve  
Chairman  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Chairman Meserve:

I am writing to express my concern about recent reports that suggest the Commission will reduce on-site inspections of our nation's nuclear power plants as part of its new inspection regime. Although I understand that the new system addresses a number of short-comings in the existing program, I do not believe reducing actual inspections by NRC personnel makes sense as reactors age.

As you know, a recent analysis from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) entitled: *The NRC's New Oversight Process: On the Road to Effective Regulation?* concludes that the proposed reactor inspection and oversight program represents an improvement over the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) and Watch List procedures. However, the analysis also states that these improvements could be undermined by reductions in on-site inspections, which could be as great as 15% when compared to existing levels. According to the UCS, a reduction of this magnitude would result in nearly 400 fewer hours of inspections compared with the current average.

Although America's nuclear power plants are the among the safest in the world, they are aging rapidly. Based on data from the Commission, the average age of operating reactors in the United States is nineteen years. As a result, many plants have already been in operation for nearly two-thirds of the average license period. As U.S. reactors age, on-site inspection becomes more important to maintaining the highest level of safety possible. Improved reporting requirements and a more objective rating system used by NRC staff can not replace inspections conducted by resident personnel and special teams from regional offices.

Recent news reports about weaknesses in the aging reactor protection system at Millstone II demonstrate the continued need for rigorous inspections. Based on these reports, it appears that the company and NRC Resident Inspector are well aware of the problem and are developing a plan to comprehensively address it. However, I believe that continued aggressive inspection is crucial to successfully completing this effort and to detecting, and correcting, other problems with aging systems at plants throughout the nation.

I appreciate your willingness to consider my comments. I firmly believe that the Commission should not reduce on-site inspection of our nuclear power plants. Although the new inspection and oversight program represents an improvement over previous systems, its effectiveness depends on continued on-site inspection at a level comparable to current practice.

Sincerely,



SAM GEJDENSON  
Member of Congress

SG:sk