

March 2, 2000

Mr. Ralph Beedle  
Senior Vice President and Chief Nuclear Officer  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
1776 I Street, N.W., Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20006-3708

Dear Mr. Beedle:

A U.S. nuclear power plant (Callaway) reported an August 12, 1999 occurrence that, although not safety significant due to the actual plant conditions at the time, highlighted potential vulnerabilities of a generic nature that we would like your assistance in addressing. (See enclosed Licensee Event Report.)

The licensee for Callaway reported that with the plant in hot standby following a plant trip, the plant switchyard voltage was observed to decrease below the minimum operability limit established in the station procedures. This low voltage was attributed to the service territory loading that was near peak levels and to the magnitude of power being transported across the grid that had not been previously observed and was far in excess of typical levels. The licensee stated that the deregulated wholesale power market contributes to conditions in which higher grid power flows are likely to occur.

The licensee indicated that two days earlier, before the plant trip, similar grid loading conditions were present, but the low switchyard voltages were not observed at that time since Callaway generation was locally supporting grid voltage. As a result, the true capability of the offsite source could not be verified through direct readings when the unit was in operation.

The low switchyard voltages observed at Callaway did not result in insufficient safety bus voltages due to the electrical bus loading conditions at the time. However, had a larger complement of safety loads been required (such as those credited for mitigating a loss-of-coolant accident), safety bus voltages from the offsite power system may have been less than adequate to power those loads. This would result in actuation of the safety bus degraded voltage protection, separation from offsite power, and restarting of the safety loads onto the onsite diesel generators.

Other licensees have also identified situations in which a plant could be operating in a region that would result in insufficient offsite system voltages to safety equipment following a plant trip associated with a design basis event. The post-trip voltages cannot be directly monitored before the event because they are the result of the plant trip and various automatic switching actions

that take place at the time of the event. These switching actions include the starting of safety loads responding to the event, the transfer of nonsafety loads to the same source (transformer) that is feeding the safety loads, and the separation of the plant generator from the switchyard when it is providing voltage support to the yard. Because the post-trip voltages cannot be read directly before a plant trip, they must be derived from the plant and grid conditions that exist during operation of the plant.

In this regard, NRC Information Notice 95-37, September 7, 1995, addressed the potential that a failure to periodically update a plant's voltage analysis as the result of changing offsite grid or plant conditions could result in unintentional operation outside regulatory requirements. NRC Information Notice 98-07, February 27, 1998, addressed a potential concern relating to electric power industry deregulation that could adversely affect the reliability of the offsite power sources. It reiterated the need to ensure that the design bases with respect to the reliability and stability of the offsite power sources do not degrade during the life of the nuclear facility. We are also currently in the process of issuing an Information Notice and Inspection Report on the issues surrounding the Callaway event.

Our staff found from its work (ORNL/NRC/LTR/98-12, August 1998) on utility industry deregulation that there is significant variation between control areas, and utilities within control areas, regarding the amount of attention paid to this subject. The safety consequences that would result if an event, albeit unlikely, occurred during a period of degraded grid voltage are difficult to assess because most licensees have not analyzed all of their systems for the double-starting and degraded-voltage operation they might undergo in such a scenario. Maintaining adequate offsite power is a requirement of General Design Criterion (GDC) 17 and plant technical specifications.

We would like to better understand the risk implications of electrical system designs under degraded voltage conditions, including information on plant-specific risks of degraded-voltage and double-starting scenarios. Because of the variable nature of this scenario's initiating frequency and effect on safety equipment, a wide range of risk across the population of nuclear plants appears possible. We have found from our work (NUREG/CR-6538, July 1997) on this subject that these scenarios have not been evaluated in the majority of plant-specific probabilistic risk assessments.

We believe that our licensees are in the best position to assess this situation, understand the risks, and decide what, if any, actions need to be taken to assure continued compliance with GDC 17. Therefore, we propose that this subject be addressed as a voluntary industry initiative. Your help on these matters would be appreciated. We would like to schedule a public meeting

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in the near future to discuss this issue and an approach for interaction with the industry. Please contact José A. Calvo of my staff at (301) 415-2774.

Sincerely,

**(/RA by S. J. Collins)**

Samuel J. Collins, Director  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure: Licensee Event Report dated September 13, 1999

cc w/enc: See attached lists

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Samuel J. Collins, Director  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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Nuclear Energy Institute

cc:

Mr. Joe F. Colvin  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Ms. Lynnette Hendricks, Director  
Plant Support  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Mr. Alex Marion, Director  
Programs  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Mr. David Modeen, Director  
Engineering  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Mr. Anthony Pietrangelo, Director  
Licensing  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Mr. Jim Davis, Director  
Operations  
Nuclear Energy Institute  
Suite 400  
1776 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Boiling Water Reactor Owners Group

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cc:

Mr. W. Glenn Warren  
BWR Owners' Group Chairman  
Southern Nuclear Company  
42 Inverness Parkway  
PO Box 1295  
Birmingham, AL 35201

Mr. James M. Kenny  
BWR Owners' Group Vice Chairman  
PP&L, Inc.  
Mail Code GENA6-1  
Allentown, PA 18101-1179

Mr. Thomas J. Rausch  
RRG Chairman  
Commonwealth Edison Company  
Nuclear Fuel Services  
1400 Opus Place, 4th Floor  
Downers Grove, IL 60515-5701

Mr. Drew B. Fetters  
PECO Energy  
Nuclear Group Headquarters  
MC 61A-3  
965 Chesterbrook Blvd.  
Wayne, PA 19087-5691

Mr. H. Lewis Sumner  
Southern Nuclear Company  
40 Inverness Parkway  
PO Box 1295  
Birmingham, GA 35201

Mr. Carl D. Terry  
Vice President, Nuclear Engineering  
Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation  
Nine Mile Point - Station  
OPS Bldg/2nd Floor  
PO Box 63  
Lycoming, NY 13093

Mr. George T. Jones  
PP&L, Inc.  
MC GENA6-1  
Two North Ninth Street  
Allentown, PA 18101

Mr. John Kelly  
New York Power Authority  
14th Floor Mail Stop 14K  
Centroplex Building  
123 Main Street  
White Plains, NY 10601

Mr. Thomas G. Hurst  
GE Nuclear Energy  
M/C 182  
175 Curtner Avenue  
San Jose, CA 95125

Mr. Thomas A. Green  
GE Nuclear Energy  
M/C 182  
175 Curtner Avenue  
San Jose, CA 95125

CE Owners Group

cc:

Mr. Gordon C. Bischoff, Project Director  
CE Owners Group  
ABB Combustion Engineering Nuclear Power  
M.S. 9615-1932  
2000 Day Hill Road  
Post Office Box 500  
Windsor, CT 06095

Mr. Ralph Phelps, Chairman  
CE Owners Group  
Omaha Public Power District  
P.O. Box 399  
Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023-0399

Mr. Ian C. Rickard, Director  
Nuclear Licensing  
ABB Combustion Engineering Nuclear Power  
2000 Day Hill Road  
Post Office Box 500  
Windsor, CT 06095

Mr. Charles B. Brinkman, Manager  
Washington Operations  
ABB Combustion Engineering Nuclear Power  
12300 Twinbrook Parkway, Suite 330  
Rockville, MD 20852

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Westinghouse Owners Group

cc:

Mr. H. A. Sepp, Manager  
Regulatory and Licensing Engineering  
Westinghouse Electric Corporation  
P.O. Box 355  
Pittsburgh, PA 15230-0355

Mr. Andrew Drake, Project Manager  
Westinghouse Owners Group  
Westinghouse Electric Corporation  
Mail Stop ECE 5-16  
P.O. Box 355  
Pittsburgh, PA 15230-0355

Mr. Jack Bastin, Director  
Regulatory Affairs  
Westinghouse Electric Corporation  
11921 Rockville Pike  
Suite 107  
Rockville, MD 20852

R. Beedle

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B&W Owners Group

cc:

Randy Hutchinson, Chairman  
B&WOG Executive Committee  
Vice President Operations  
Arkansas Nuclear One  
Entergy Operations, Inc.  
1448 S.R. 333  
Russellville, AK 72801-0967

Mr. W. W. Foster, Chairman  
B&WOG Steering Committee  
Director of Safety Assurance  
Duke Power Company  
Oconee Nuclear Station  
P.O. Box 1439  
Seneca, SC 29679

Mr. J. J. Kelly, Manager  
B&W Owners Group Services  
Framatome Technologies, Inc.  
P.O. Box 10935  
Lynchburg, VA 24506-0935

Mr. F. McPhatter, Manager  
Framatome Cogema Fuels  
3315 Old Forest Road  
P.O. Box 10935  
Lynchburg, VA 24506-0935

Mr. R. Schomaker, Manager  
Framatome Cogema Fuels  
3315 Old Forest Road  
P.O. Box 10935  
Lynchburg, VA 24506-0935

Mr. Michael Schoppman  
Licensing Manager  
Framatome Technologies, Inc.  
1700 Rockville Pike, Suite 525  
Rockville, MD 20852-1631

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Electric Power Research Institute

cc:

Mr. Gary L. Vine  
Senior Washington Representative  
Electric Power Research Institute  
2000 L Street, N.W., Suite 805  
Washington, DC 20036

Mr. James F. Lang  
Electric Power Research Institute  
Post Office Box 217097  
1300 W.T. Harris Boulevard  
Charlotte, NC 28262

Mr. Bindi Chexal  
Electric Power Research Institute  
Post Office Box 10412  
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Mr. Raymond C. Torok  
Project Manager, Nuclear Power Group  
Electric Power Research Institute  
Post Office Box 10412  
Palo Alto, CA 94303

BWR Vessel & Internals Project Group

cc:

Bill Eaton, Executive Chair  
BWRVIP Inspection Committee  
Entergy Operations, Inc.  
PO Box 756, Waterloo Rd  
Port Gibson, MS 39150-0756

Harry P. Salmon, Executive Chairman  
BWRVIP Integration Task  
New York Power Authority  
123 Main St., M/S 11 D  
White Plains, NY 10601-3104

James P. Pelletier, BWRVIP Liaison  
to EPRI Nuclear Power Council  
Nebraska Public Power District  
1200 Prospect Avenue  
PO Box 98  
Brownville, NE 68321-0098

Robert Carter, EPRI BWRVIP Assessment  
Manager  
Greg Selby, EPRI BWRVIP Inspection  
Manager  
EPRI NDE Center  
P. O. Box 217097  
1300 W. T. Harris Blvd.  
Charlotte, NC 28221

Joe Hagan, BWRVIP Vice Chairman  
PEPCO Energy Co.  
MC 62C-3  
965 Chesterbrook Blvd  
Wayne, PA 19807-5691

Steve Lewis, Technical Chairman  
BWRVIP Assessment Task  
Entergy  
P. O. Box 756  
Waterloo Road  
Port Gibson, MS 39150

Carl Larsen, Technical Chairman  
BWRVIP Inspection Task  
P.O. Box 157  
Vernon, VT 05354

John Wilson, Technical Chairman  
BWRVIP Mitigation Task  
Clinton Power Station, M/C T-31C  
P.O. Box 678  
Clinton, IL 61727

Vaughn Wagoner, Technical Chairman  
BWRVIP Integration Task  
Carolina Power & Light Company  
One Hannover Square 9C1  
P.O. Box 1551  
Raleigh, NC 27612

Bruce McLeod, Technical Chairman  
BWRVIP Repair Task  
Southern Nuclear Operating Co.  
Post Office Box 1295  
40 Inverness Center Parkway  
Birmingham, AL 35201

Tom Mulford, EPRI BWRVIP Integration  
Manager

Raj Pathania, EPRI BWRVIP Mitigation  
Manager

Ken Wolfe, EPRI BWRVIP Repair Manager  
Electric Power Research Institute  
P. O. Box 10412  
3412 Hillview Ave.  
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Mr. Ray Shadis, Staff  
New England Coalition on Nuclear Pollution  
P. O. Box 76  
Edgecomb, Maine 04556

BWR Vessel & Internals Project Group (cont.)

R. Beedle

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cc:

Mr. David Kraft  
Nuclear Energy Information Services  
P. O. Box 1637  
Evanston, IL 60204