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Subcommittee on Rural Health

SANDRA R. GALEF  
Assemblywoman 90th District

February 18, 2000

Chairman Richard A. Meserve  
Commissioner Nils J. Diaz  
Commissioner Greta J. Dicus  
Commissioner Edward McGaffigan, Jr.  
Commissioner Jeffrey S. Merrifield  
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Meserve and Commissioners:

In light of the recent mishap at the Con Edison nuclear plant at Indian Point in Buchanan, New York, I am writing to you to request that your agency conduct a thorough examination of the steam generators at the plant before any decision is made to return this facility to service. I believe that this measure is a practical and conservative step that will help to reassure the people living around the plant, who reside in my 90th Assembly District, that their health and safety is being appropriately safeguarded. I am concerned about public safety if Indian Point 2 returns to service without such an extensive NRC examination.

I understand that the company had indications of leaking steam generator tubes beginning last October, and that the indicated leak rate increased significantly on February 6th. I understand that management at Indian Point 2 met to consider the leakage and decided to keep the plant running. The accident occurred only nine days later.

I also understand that steam generators like the ones presently installed at Indian Point 2 have already been replaced at all other nuclear plants in the United States. Thus, Indian Point 2 is taking unnecessary safety risks by continuing to use its degraded steam generators. I fear that cost saving measures are jeopardizing the health and safety of the residents of Westchester County.

I have been apprised of the long-standing and still unresolved debate within the NRC about the potential consequences from an accident where more than a single steam generator tube breaks. I understand the possibility that the failure of as few as fifteen steam generator tubes could lead to reactor core meltdown because the emergency pumps cannot supply sufficient flow to compensate for the volume of water pouring out through the broken tubes.

The unique age and condition of the steam generators at Indian Point 2, the decision by the company to continue running the plant with known tube leaks, and the inability of the NRC to resolve concerns about multiple tube breaks is troubling to me. Steam generators with fragile tubes used by a company with a demonstrated disregard for tube leaks seems to be the ingredients for a disastrous meltdown accident. I feel that the best way for the NRC to allay these concerns is to conduct a thorough examination of Indian Point 2 steam generators and to require correction of any identified problems before that facility resumes operation. Similar thorough examinations, commonly called "vertical slice inspections," have been recently conducted at Millstone, DC Cook, and Vermont Yankee.

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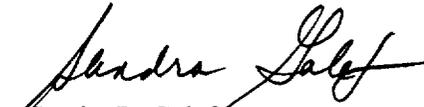
The public needs to know that adequate safety margins exist at the plant. Following the inspection and prior to the agency's restart decision, the NRC should present its results at a public meeting to be held at a time and location convenient to public attendance in the vicinity of the plant.

I would prefer Consolidated Edison to take this opportunity to replace the degraded steam generators at Indian Point 2 with the spare units the company purchased expressly for this purpose a few years ago. These replacements are already at Indian Point 2 and would have, had they been installed in the plant instead of stored in the warehouse, prevented the recent accident. Now would seem to be the second best time to make the switch – the best time having been the last refueling outage.

In addition, I am requesting that the NRC review the notification procedures undertaken by Con Edison at the time of this emergency. Although emergency services in the county were alerted of the leak, local officials were not, and learned of the incident either through the media or from their constituents. I believe the omission of municipal officials in the notification process must be corrected.

I think everyone is relieved that the recent occurrence did not endanger those living close to the Con Edison Indian Point plant. I am hopeful that we can work together to improve procedures for both Indian Point plants that will help to reassure our residents with safety concerns. Thank you in advance for your prompt consideration of my requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra R. Galef". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Sandra R. Galef  
Member of Assembly