

May 1, 2000

The Honorable Sam Gejdenson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Gejdenson:

I am responding to your letter of March 27, 2000, concerning the Millstone Nuclear Power Station emergency preparedness program. Based upon performance during the March 15, 2000 exercise, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff has concluded that Northeast Utilities, the licensee for Millstone, is capable of implementing its NRC-approved emergency plan. As you know, that plan, in conjunction with State and local plans, is in place to ensure that adequate measures to protect public health and safety can be taken in the event of an actual radiological emergency.

I would like to address briefly the comments made by a member of your staff who observed the March 15 exercise. Although your staff member commented that the technology in the emergency control center appeared to be antiquated, the NRC staff, based on its observations during the drill, noted that computer, communications, and other emergency preparedness equipment in use in the simulator control room and Emergency Operations Facility (EOF) adequately supported the licensee's emergency response organization. The equipment served its intended purpose of relaying data and information throughout the licensee's emergency response organization and facilities.

Your staff member also commented that there appeared to be no video surveillance or other monitoring equipment in the reactor core, in the containment vessel, or outside the plant for actual observations. Because of the harsh environment in the core under operating conditions and in the containment during accident conditions, video surveillance equipment would not be functional. However, the NRC requires that a number of safety-related parameters be monitored during both normal operations and accident conditions. These parameters include: reactor power, pressure, and temperature; reactor coolant system level; and, containment building parameters, such as pressure, temperature, water level, humidity, and radiation levels. These parameters are monitored by instruments that alarm when preset levels are exceeded. These alarms, along with other indications those instruments provide, inform control room operators of abnormal conditions and allow them to take actions to deal with those conditions. Observations outside of the plant can be effectively communicated to the control room or EOF by licensee emergency response personnel.

Further, your staff member raised questions concerning plans for the long-term support of emergency responders onsite including provisions for the movement of emergency workers among facilities, for their transportation between the site and their homes, and for other needs such as food, water, and sleeping quarters. While our regulations do not require that these matters be tested during a biennial exercise, they do require that licensee emergency plans address them. For example, the transportation arrangements of emergency workers returning

to the site to relieve emergency workers would be coordinated with offsite State and local emergency preparedness agencies based on previous agreements. More specifically, to facilitate the entry of relief workers re-entering the site, the EOF would contact the local offsite emergency operation centers, which in turn would contact the State Police coordinating the traffic control points. Group transportation into and out of the evacuated area would be arranged, with considerations for the weather conditions in the area, in coordination with the State Police and other local authorities.

With respect to staffing and logistical support for an extended emergency, the licensee would implement continuous staffing in the control room and in other emergency response facilities, as required. Our inspection program evaluates whether the licensee maintains an emergency response organization that is of sufficient depth to staff required positions for long-term events. Depending upon accident conditions and other factors, including weather conditions, off-duty personnel would be permitted to return to their homes for rest and meals. There are food supplies available onsite at the licensee's cafeteria to support the short-term needs of the licensee's emergency response personnel. The plan anticipates that arrangements would also be made for additional supplies to be brought to the site to support a longer-term response.

Based on the NRC staff's observations, the Commission believes that the results of the exercise on March 15, 2000, successfully demonstrated the licensee's ability to provide reasonable assurance of adequate protection of the health and safety of the public. If you have further questions on these issues, please contact me.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard A. Meserve