

August 25, 2000

Mr. Robert Christie
Performance Technology
P. O. Box 51663
Knoxville, Tennessee 37950-1663

Dear Mr. Christie:

I am responding to your July 10, 2000, letter to the Chairman and the Commissioners. Your letter was in regard to comments made by Mr. James P. Riccio at the June 20, 2000, Commission briefing on risk-informing 10 CFR 50.

While it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in discussions between you and Mr. Riccio, I believe that I should reiterate the intentions of NRC's work to risk-inform Part 50. That is, our work is intended to better focus attention on design and operational issues commensurate with their safety importance. In risk-informing Part 50, we are applying our improved understanding of risk from our increased operational experience and our improved tools such that we have a better safety focus. We recognize that this work may result in both reductions and increases in regulatory requirements.

As you are aware, the staff is developing a framework for reviewing Part 50 requirements to make them more risk-informed. In parallel, we are preparing an analysis and recommendations for potential changes to 10 CFR 50.44 (concerning combustible gas, principally hydrogen, control during accidents), which we expect to provide to the Commission for decision in August 2000. We have presented this work to the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS), and have discussed with that committee the merits of both reductions in some hydrogen control requirements and increases in other requirements. We will be further using this framework to examine potential changes to emergency core cooling requirements, special treatment requirements, and to identify and prioritize other potential changes to Part 50 requirements. We expect to provide recommendations on these other issues to the Commission in December 2000.

All of this upcoming staff work to risk-inform Part 50 will be the subject of public scrutiny, via ACRS meetings, public meetings, and public workshops. We value the comments received from the public and will consider them as we progress in risk-informing Part 50. I invite both you and Mr. Riccio to continue to participate in these fora and to continue to comment on this work.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Ashok C. Thadani, Director
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

cc: J.P. Riccio

* Previously concurred.

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