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FROM: DUE: / / EDO CONTROL: G20000442
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FINAL REPLY:

Dana A. Powers, ACRS

TO: Chairman Meserve

FOR SIGNATURE OF : ** GRN ** CRC NO: 00-0580

DESC: Causes and Significance of Design Basis Issues at U.S. Nuclear Power Plants
ROUTING: Travers
Paperiello
Miraglia
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Craig
Burns/Cyr
Collins, NRR
Millman, OEDO
ACRS File

DATE: 09/15/00

ASSIGNED TO: RES CONTACT: Thadani

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OR REMARKS:
No response necessary.

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AUTHOR: DANA POWERS
AFFILIATION: ~~ACPS~~ *ACRS*
ADDRESSEE: RICHARD MESERVE
SUBJECT: CAUSES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DESIGN BASIS ISSUES AT U.S. NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

ACTION: Appropriate
DISTRIBUTION: RF

LETTER DATE: 09/08/2000
ACKNOWLEDGED No
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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REACTOR SAFEGUARDS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

September 8, 2000

The Honorable Richard A. Meserve
Chairman
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Meserve:

SUBJECT: CAUSES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DESIGN BASIS ISSUES AT U.S. NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

During the 475th meeting of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS), August 29 - September 1, 2000, we met with representatives of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff to review their study of design basis issues (DBIs). The study describes trends and causes of DBIs. The ACRS had previously expressed concern that the disbanding of the Office of Analysis and Evaluation of Operational Data (AEOD) would make it difficult to retain the assessment of operational experience. Therefore, we are pleased to learn that analyses of data have been continued.

The staff examined Licensee Event Reports (LERs) to determine the level of risk of the finding, whether safety system intervention occurred, whether an actual or a potential event took place, and the consequences of the event described in the LER (failed or degraded system or train). From 1985 through 1997, the leading causes of DBIs were original design errors - 72%, procedure deficiencies - 28%, and human errors - 22% (note that more than one cause has generally contributed to each DBI).

Emergency core cooling, emergency ac/dc power, and containment and containment isolation were the safety related systems that accounted for about half of the DBIs. About 19% were potentially risk significant. Although the number of DBIs increased substantially due in part to increased scrutiny, the fraction of DBI events that qualified as accident sequence precursor events decreased from approximately 8% in 1990 to less than 1% in 1997.

The lessons learned from the data analysis support our contention that it is important not to lose the capability that resided with the former AEOD. This particular compilation of data on operational experience should have an impact on how probabilistic risk assessments (PRAs) are reviewed. The results imply that the risk contribution of design faults revealed by operational experience is limited.

The small fraction of risk significant events suggests that the criteria for what constitutes DBI LERs should be redefined. This would reduce the burden of reporting requirements with no impact on safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dana A. Powers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

Dana A. Powers
Chairman

Reference:

U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research Draft Report, "Causes and Significance of Design Basis Issues at U. S. Nuclear Power Plants," May 2000.