

October 26, 2000

Ms. Pamela Slater
ATTN: STAR Foundation
7 Kensington Road
Scarsdale, New York 10583

Dear Ms. Slater:

Thank you for your comments to Chairman Meserve on the renewal of nuclear power plant operating licenses.

The Atomic Energy Act established a 40-year license term for power reactors, but also provided that such licenses could be renewed. Public comment was sought when the regulations were amended in 1991 and 1995 to include a process for renewal in Part 54 of Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Public comment was also sought when the associated environmental impact requirements in Part 51 were amended for license renewal in 1996.

The license renewal requirements provide for a plant-specific determination that aging effects can be adequately managed during the period of extended operation. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is currently seeking public comment on updated guidance for the evaluation of plant-specific applications for license renewal, including a report on generic aging lessons learned. Recent media reports erroneously described this guidance as the only opportunity for public comment for license renewal. The NRC requested comments on the updated renewal guidance by October 16, 2000, in preparation for a meeting of the Commission planned for December 4, 2000, to specifically discuss the extent to which existing inspection and maintenance activities need to be augmented for license renewal.

Comments on the license renewal guidance submitted after October 16, 2000, will be considered to the extent practical up to the time the proposed final guidance is submitted to the Commission for approval, presently scheduled for March 2001.

The license renewal process provides for individual hearings, public meetings and a request for public comment in the vicinity of each plant that submits a license renewal application.

Additional information about the license renewal process and related evaluation guidance is available on the NRC webpage at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/REACTOR/LR/index.html>.

With respect to "low-level" radiation, NRC regulations require licensees to have effluent and environmental monitoring programs (to quantify releases and their impact on the environment) to ensure that the impacts from plant operations are minimized. The results of these programs are reported annually and are available to the public. The permitted effluent releases result in very small doses to members of the public living around the plants (small fractions of the public dose limit). Regional NRC inspectors routinely inspect these monitoring programs to ensure continued compliance with regulatory requirements. Licensees are required to participate in an interlaboratory comparison program which provides an independent check on the accuracy and precision of the environmental measurements. Additionally, the National Cancer Institute, at

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the request of Congress, conducted a study¹ of 52 nuclear power stations and 10 Department of Energy facilities. The study concluded that there was no increase in cancers in the communities surrounding the nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Christopher I. Grimes, Chief
License Renewal and Standardization Branch
Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

¹“Cancer in Populations Living Near Nuclear Facilities,” Jablon, et al., National Cancer Institute, July 1990. [NIH Publication No. 90-874]

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