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OIP Background Paper 9/1999

MEXICO

Background:

Mexico's nuclear program began in the mid-1950's with work on sub-atomic particles in various universities around the country, and the construction of a pilot plant for the milling, refining, and conversion of uranium at the School of Chemistry. In 1955, the Comision Nacional de Energia Nuclear was formed to regulate, protect, and develop nuclear materials. It was reorganized in 1972 as the Instituto Nacional de Energia Nuclear; in 1979 it was again reorganized, renamed, and divided into three separate entities:

The Comision Nacional de Seguridad Nuclear y Salvaguardias (CNCNS) the National Nuclear Commission for Safety and Safeguards, our counterparts, responsible for regulating the safety of nuclear installations (applying mostly U.S. regulatory requirements); and

The Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Nucleares (ININ) the National Institute of Nuclear Research, responsible for planning and implementing research and development in nuclear science and technology, and information dissemination; and

The Urania Medicago (Uranium of Mexico), formed to carry out uranium ore exploration, exploitation, milling and mining functions.

In 1974 an agreement was reached with General Electric (GE) to build Laguna Verde I&II, located at Alto Lucero on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, 70 kilometers north of Veracruz. Laguna Verde's steam supply systems are from GE, the turbogenerators are from Mitsubishi, and the architect/engineer for both units is Ebasco Corp. Mexico adopted NRC's regulations and supporting guides as the basis for acceptance of the design, construction, and operation of Laguna Verde.

In June of this year, the General Manager and several other senior managers at the Laguna Verde NPP were suspended from their positions for 60 days for failing to comply with government regulations requiring a 20-day waiting period before signing contracts with suppliers. The Ministry of Energy (the agency the CNSNS reports to) officials named a new General Manager for Laguna Verde, not wishing to leave the top position vacant for the 60-day period. The new General Manager, Ing. Miguel Medina Vaillard, is well known to the NRC, having served for the last several years as the Director General of CNSNS. Ing. Jose Luis Delgado, Director of the Nuclear Safety Division of CNSNS, has been named Director General.

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In SRM COMNJD-99-004, the NRC staff was asked to explore: establishing a reliable communication link between the CNSNS and NRC, developing and implementing an emergency evaluation exercise at Laguna Verde NPP, and initiating a research agreement that would waive the first year's computer membership fees. The September 14, 1999 response is currently before the Commission.

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