

May 24, 2001

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

SUBJECT: STAFF REQUIREMENTS MEMORANDUM DATED APRIL 11, 2001, ON THE
MARCH 22, 2001, ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NUCLEAR WASTE (ACNW)
BRIEFING OF THE COMMISSION

Dear Chairman Meserve:

We are responding to the April 11, 2001, staff requirements memorandum (SRM) pertaining to the ACNW's March 22, 2001, briefing of the Commission on our integrated strategy to evaluate the staff's licensing capability and sufficiency review. We are pleased that the Commission supports the ACNW's vertical slice approach. As requested, the Committee will conduct its review with minimal impact on the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff resources.

The Commission made several other requests, including that the Committee provide an index when using acronyms and explain technical terms in ACNW letter reports. We acknowledge the Commission's concern about the use of undefined acronyms and will correct this concern in the future.

The Commission requested that the ACNW provide specific recommendations on how to improve the NRC staff's communications with the public. The ACNW has addressed the issue of risk communication and stakeholder involvement in several past letters, in particular, our letters of December 23, 1999, August 18, 2000, and November 1, 2000. In these letters, we made specific recommendations aimed at improving public outreach based on input we received from stakeholders during our meetings in Nevada and Europe. We have scheduled a meeting in June on the staff's progress on public outreach and communication, and we plan to meet with stakeholders in Nevada in October 2001. At that time, we will update our recommendations regarding public outreach.

The Commission requested the ACNW to provide specific recommendations on key technical issues that warrant scrutiny by the NRC and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). In our February 2001 letter, we commended the staff for its progress in key technical issue resolution, but also identified several concerns, including whether key technical issues and subissues are being integrated and whether all important subissues have been identified, especially coupled processes. The staff's reply to our letter provided us more information regarding the staff's current activities to ensure integration of key technical issues. We have scheduled staff briefings in July and August 2001 on the status of the NRC staff's sufficiency review and the draft integrated issue resolution status report. We expect to gain greater knowledge of the staff's process for integrating the key technical issues from these briefings. Should we identify

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specific issues which warrant greater emphasis or scrutiny during our reviews, we will bring them to your attention.

Finally, during the March 22nd briefing, Commissioner Dicus asked the Committee about the importance of microbially induced corrosion (MIC) of the waste package. At the time, the Committee was unsure whether the DOE had a program in this area. Since then, DOE has informed us about its program on MIC at Yucca Mountain and has offered to brief the ACNW on this topic in the near future. We will keep you informed.

Sincerely,

/RA/

B. John Garrick
Chairman

Reference:

Memorandum dated April 11, 2001, from Annette L. Vietti-Cook, Secretary, to John T. Larkins, Executive Director, ACRS/ACNW, Subject: Staff Requirements - Meeting with ACNW Thursday, March 22, 2001.