June 28, 2001

Mr. T. A. Coleman, Vice President
Framatome Advanced Nuclear Fuels
P. O. Box 10935
Lynchburg, VA 24506

Dear Mr. Coleman:

In the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Agency Program Plan for High-Burnup Fuel (July 6, 1998), it was concluded that it would be appropriate for the industry to generate data to support acceptance criteria and assessments for burnup extensions beyond the current limit of 62 GWd/t. Nevertheless, it was stated that the NRC would consider cooperation with the industry in the data phase of such test programs. The purpose of this letter is to invite Framatome to collaborate with NRC and other industry representatives in generating data to address high-burnup fuel issues for reactor use and for dry storage. This collaboration would be similar to existing industry and NRC collaboration on research with Zircaloy-clad fuel rods. Interpretation of data would be done independently.

By way of background, the NRC has a strong research program at Argonne National Laboratory to investigate high-burnup issues for Zircaloy-clad fuel rods. This program is being conducted with cooperation from the Electric Power Research Institute and the Department of Energy, and the program is designed to provide realistic results without excessive conservative margins. Further, the issues being addressed in this program have been discussed rather extensively at NRC by a panel that included many industry experts (see www.nrc.gov/RES/PIRT). A logical extension of the program at Argonne would include future tests on fuel rods with Framatome's M5 cladding, Westinghouse's ZIRLO cladding and the Zircaloy Duplex cladding. Consistent with our current regulations, vendor-specific proprietary information could be held in confidence.

Our staff discussed the possibility of testing M5-clad fuel with you and other Framatome representatives at NRC headquarters on February 23, at which time we outlined some of the work that would be done. Related telephone conversations have also been held. To carry out this work, we would of course need your cooperation with fuel rods and cladding materials for the tests and your input in the planning of those tests. Following the example of the current work we are doing with EPRI, your involvement in planning the tests would be of substantial benefit to the program.

We hope you will agree that this type of cooperative testing is an efficient, cost effective method to confirm expectations of the cladding performance under accident conditions. I hope you will work with us on this important program, and I would encourage you and your staff to

continue our discussions to make suitable arrangements. Please note that we are sending a similar letter to Westinghouse in connection with their ZIRLO cladding, and related letters are being sent to EPRI and the Nuclear Energy Institute.

Sincerely,

/RA/ original signed by R. Zimmerman for:

Ashok C. Thadani, Director
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

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