



# Union of Concerned Scientists

## Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

June 26, 2001

Mr. Christopher I. Grimes, Chief  
License Renewal and Standardization Branch  
Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation  
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555-0001  
Earth

Dear Mr. Grimes:

Thank you for arranging for the Union of Concerned Scientists to have a seat at the table during the license renewal meeting scheduled for Thursday, June 28, 2001. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend this meeting due to a matter that just recently developed. I had prepared three topics that I planned to cover during the meeting. Those topics are:

1. Gaseous and liquid radwaste systems: In May 2000, UCS submitted a petition for rulemaking seeking to revise the scope of the license renewal rule to cover those portions of the gaseous and liquid radwaste systems whose failure could potentially cause excessive releases of radioactivity to the environment. The justification that accompanied our petition provided some examples of credible equipment failures. We continue to believe that the rule needs to explicitly address these vulnerabilities.
2. Adequacy of aging management programs: During the session on license renewal that you chaired at the 2001 Regulatory Information Conference, I presented data on eight unplanned reactor shutdowns since January 1, 2000, due to equipment failures caused by aging. That list has been amended by an additional shutdown. Given that the primary purpose of aging management programs is to monitor the condition of important equipment and structures so as to effect repairs and replacements before failures occur, these reactor shutdowns indicate that the programs may not be achieving the expectations. We think that the data suggest that the license renewal rule, or the associated regulatory guidance, needs to be made more explicit with respect to the criteria defining acceptable minimum standards for aging management programs.
3. One-time inspections: At the workshop last fall and the subsequent Commission briefing, UCS conveyed a concern about one-time inspections. Today, the NRC grants license renewal applications predicated on the assumption that the one-time inspections will confirm negligible degradation. But what if these 'confirmatory' inspections reveal problems when the inspections are finally conducted years later? The licenses will have already been renewed and the plant owners may cry "Backfit!" when the NRC requests reasonable efforts based on

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the newly acquired knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The license renewal rule, or its associated regulatory guidance, may need to be made more explicit with respect to the staff's authority in dealing with one-time inspection surprises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Lochbaum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Lochbaum  
Nuclear Safety Engineer  
Washington Office

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<sup>1</sup> A representative of an industry group has already presented to the Commission his belief that the NRC must go through the backfit rigmarole before asking any plant owner follow voluntary initiatives.