

September 20, 2001

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Infrastructure, and Nuclear Safety
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The purpose of this letter is to provide information to you on Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) activities related to the Department of Energy's (DOE's) program to produce tritium in Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA's) Watts Bar and Sequoyah reactors. The NRC received TVA's request of August 20, 2001, to amend the Watts Bar Unit 1 license to permit use of Watts Bar Unit 1 in this program. The proposed amendment would permit TVA to place up to 2304 tritium-producing burnable absorber rods (TPBARs) into the Unit 1 reactor and irradiate them for one fuel cycle (about 18 months). TVA would then remove the irradiated TPBARs and DOE would ship them to its tritium extraction facility in Savannah River, South Carolina. Under its arrangement with DOE, TVA then plans to insert new TPBARs in the Unit 1 reactor and repeat the process for the life of the plant.

TVA's license amendment request involves several plant-specific interface issues and license changes that the NRC must review and approve before TVA can insert the TPBARs into the Watts Bar reactor. NRC plans to complete this review by August 20, 2002, as TVA requests. NRC expects TVA will submit a similar amendment request for Sequoyah Units 1 and 2 in September 2001. The same process will be followed for that request.

The NRC staff held a public meeting with TVA and DOE on August 20, 2001, at NRC headquarters, at which DOE and TVA presented an overview of the program to produce tritium in commercial light-water reactors. The NRC staff plans to schedule a public meeting with TVA and DOE near the Watts Bar site for October 2, 2001, and expects to hold another public meeting with TVA and DOE near the Watts Bar site before completing the amendment request review. The public will be invited to make comments at both meetings. As is the Commission's practice for all proposed amendments to reactor operating licenses, a notice and opportunity for hearing on TVA's proposed amendments will be published in the Federal Register.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard A. Meserve

cc: Senator James M. Inhofe

Identical letters sent to:

The Honorable Carl Levin, Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Senator John Warner

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Senator Frank Murkowski

The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

cc: Representative Rick Boucher

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Infrastructure, and Nuclear Safety
Committee on Environment and Public
Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Senator James M. Inhofe

The Honorable Bob Stump, Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

cc: Representative Ike Skelton

The Honorable James M. Jeffords, Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public
Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Senator Bob Smith

The Honorable W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

cc: Representative John D. Dingell

The Honorable Sonny Callahan, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

cc: Representative Peter J. Visclosky

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Senator Pete V. Domenici