

October 5, 2001

The Honorable Paul E. Kanjorski
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Kanjorski:

I am responding to your letter dated August 27, 2001, to Dennis Rathbun, in which you requested information in response to concerns raised by your constituent, Amy Laubach, about the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station nuclear power plant in Salem Township, Pennsylvania. PPL Susquehanna, LLC, is the licensee authorized by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to operate this facility. Ms. Laubach asked several questions about whether air and water in the vicinity of the plant are tested for radioactivity and whether radioactive waste generated by the plant is disposed of properly.

Ensuring the control of radioactive materials generated in nuclear power plants is one of the primary responsibilities of the NRC. The NRC has established regulatory limits on releases of radioactive material to the environment. These limits are based on conservative assumptions that any possible radiation exposures to members of the public from nuclear power plant operation should only be a very small fraction of what they receive from natural environmental radiation.

The NRC routinely inspects nuclear power plants for compliance with its regulations. At least two NRC resident inspectors are stationed at each nuclear power plant site and routinely tour the plants to verify that they are operated in accordance with the NRC's regulations. I have enclosed a copy of our brochure "NRC—Regulator of Nuclear Safety" which provides an overview of our regulatory and inspection processes. This brochure also provides general information on Ms. Laubach's questions. I also address her questions below.

The air and water in the area near nuclear power plants are tested by the licensee's personnel on a regular basis. This testing is part of an environmental monitoring program that the NRC requires each nuclear power plant licensee to conduct. The environmental monitoring program samples diverse environmental media, including the air, water, sediment, milk, food products, and fish, from areas around the power plant. All of these samples are analyzed for the presence of any radioactive material that may have come from the power plant.

The results of the plant's radiological environmental monitoring program are reported annually by the licensee to the NRC, and this report is available to the public. The latest annual report for Susquehanna was provided to the NRC on May 10, 2001. The report concluded that the maximum dose to a member of the public attributable to Susquehanna's operation would amount to an additional radiation exposure of less than 0.01 percent of the radiation exposure received from other, primarily naturally occurring, radiation sources.

In addition to the routine inspections conducted by the NRC's resident inspectors, the NRC periodically conducts a focused inspection of the plant's environmental monitoring program to verify the licensee's compliance with the regulations. The last focused inspection at Susquehanna was completed on October 16, 1999, and the results were documented in an inspection report published on November 18, 1999. No adverse findings were identified. The latest inspection of the licensee's environmental monitoring program was completed on August 31, 2001. The results of this inspection will be documented in an upcoming inspection report.

In addition, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) conducts an environmental monitoring program in the area near the plant. Like the licensee's program, the State's program samples diverse environmental media. The results of the State's monitoring program are published annually and the reports are available in local public libraries. For further information regarding the State's environmental monitoring program, your constituent may contact Tonda Lewis of the PA DEP's Bureau of Radiation Protection at (717) 783-8541, or by mail at:

Bureau of Radiation Protection
Pennsylvania Department of
Environmental Protection
P.O. Box 1467
Harrisburg, PA 17105-1467

With respect to Ms. Laubach's concern regarding the water obtained from the public spring, there is no NRC requirement that the licensee sample and analyze this specific water source for radioactivity. However, as noted above, the licensee is required to conduct environmental monitoring near the plant. The licensee's monitoring program includes onsite ground water testing. The latest annual environmental monitoring report concluded that no radioactivity from the plant could be identified in the ground water samples tested. The NRC has no information to contradict the licensee's finding. Your constituent may contact her local water department or the PA DEP at (800) 426-4791 for information on the safety of this water source.

Ms. Laubach also asked where the radioactive material produced during plant outages is stored and discussed rumors related to inappropriate waste handling. NRC and U.S. Department of Transportation regulations strictly govern the packaging, transport, and disposal of radioactive wastes. Radioactive wastes must be safely packaged in approved containers, transported by qualified shipping companies, and disposed of in a licensed waste disposal facility under specific criteria. I have enclosed a copy of our brochure "Radioactive Waste: Production, Storage, Disposal" which provides an overview of these topics. This brochure also provides an explanation of the production, characteristics, and storage methods and locations of both low-level and high-level radioactive waste.

NRC inspections periodically verify that radioactive wastes are handled in accordance with the regulations. The last inspection at Susquehanna was completed on November 20, 1999, and the results were documented in an inspection report published on December 17, 1999. No adverse findings were identified. As noted previously, NRC resident inspectors routinely review the licensee's performance to ensure continued compliance with the regulations. The next

periodic inspection of the licensee's radioactive waste processing and transportation is scheduled to be completed on November 28, 2001.

Based on our inspections, there is no information to indicate that the licensee is disposing of radioactive waste in an inappropriate manner. If your constituent believes she has evidence that inappropriate disposal of radioactive waste is occurring, we encourage her to immediately contact NRC's safety hotline at (800) 695-7403. The NRC will then follow up on her concern using the NRC allegation process.

I hope this information helps to address Ms. Laubach's concerns. Additional information about the NRC's regulations and inspection program can be obtained from the NRC Web site (www.nrc.gov) or through the NRC's Office of Public Affairs at (301) 415-8200.

Sincerely,

/RA/

William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

Enclosures: As stated

cc w/o encls: Ms. Tonda Lewis

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