

October 22, 2001

George Y. Sodowick  
28 Mountain Ridge Drive  
Livingston, NJ 07039

Dear Mr. Sodowick:

I am writing in response to your letter to Chairman Meserve dated September 15, 2001. In your letter you expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of the security measures that are currently in place at civilian nuclear power facilities, and the qualifications and integrity of the people who comprise the security forces at these facilities. You also suggested that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) should consider using military police to provide security at civilian nuclear power plants, and asked if the NRC has considered a scenario in which terrorists deliberately crashed an airplane into a nuclear facility.

The NRC considers security at commercial nuclear facilities to be extremely important, and the requirements that nuclear plant licensees must meet in this regard are set forth in Title 10, Part 73, of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR Part 73). These requirements apply to all nuclear facilities, regardless of whether they are run by the Government or by private or publicly held corporations. In order to ensure that licensees maintain the ability to adequately protect their facilities, the NRC conducts inspections including periodic graded exercises that assess the licensees' responses to various threats of sabotage or theft of nuclear materials. Following each inspection and exercise, licensees are required to promptly correct any noted deficiencies.

The NRC shares your concern about the qualifications and integrity of security personnel. The requirements that individuals must meet in order to belong to a power plant security team are set forth in 10 CFR Part 73. These requirements include a satisfactory background investigation, which covers employment history, education history, criminal history, credit history, military service, psychological evaluation, and screening for drug and alcohol use. Prospective security personnel are also required to satisfactorily complete a rigorous security training program before being assigned to duty on a security team at a nuclear power plant. Additionally, security personnel are subject to continual behavioral observation and random screening for drug or alcohol use. You should also note that, with the exception of the requirement to complete the security team training, these requirements apply to *all* personnel who are allowed unescorted access to areas within a nuclear power plant.

Regarding your suggestion to use military police to provide security, you should know that other concerned citizens and Government representatives have urged the NRC to take similar measures or to federalize all security programs in nuclear power plants. The NRC will consider the issue you raised, along with many other security-related issues during the ongoing reevaluation of the agency's security regulations and procedures, which Chairman Meserve directed the staff to conduct in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. As part of this ongoing reevaluation, the NRC will discuss this and related issues with other agencies of the U.S. Government and with our counterpart regulators in other countries.

In the meanwhile, the NRC has taken steps to increase the role of Federal law in securing nuclear power plants and other large civilian nuclear facilities. This past June, the NRC renewed its request for Congress to provide Federal authority for guards at civilian nuclear facilities, and to strengthen existing Federal criminal laws in order to provide a greater deterrence for acts of theft and sabotage aimed at these facilities.

Finally, you asked if the NRC has considered "what if a terrorist group crashes a plane into a nuclear facility." The NRC did not specifically contemplate attacks by aircraft such as Boeing 757s or 767s, and nuclear power plants were not designed to withstand such crashes. In fact, many nuclear plants were designed and constructed before such aircraft were developed. However, nuclear plants do have an inherent capability to protect public health and safety through such features as robust containment buildings, redundant safety systems, and highly trained operators. Nuclear plants are also among the most hardened structures in the country and are designed to withstand extreme events, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes. In addition, all NRC licensees with significant radiological material have emergency response plans to enable them to mitigate the potential impacts on the public in the event of a release. As part of our follow-up to the attacks on September 11, the NRC will evaluate the potential consequences of such an attack on a nuclear power plant and develop any needed compensatory measures.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concern, and I hope that I have adequately addressed the issues that you raised. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Samuel J. Collins, Director  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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/RA/

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