

December 13, 2001

Ms. Mary Ott, Co-Chairman
Citizens Urging Responsible Energy
P.O. Box 2621
Duxbury, Massachusetts 02331

Dear Ms. Ott:

I am responding on behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to your letter dated October 18, 2001, in which you requested that the NRC conduct a public hearing within the emergency planning zone for the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station (PNPS). As the basis for your request, you stated that residents in your area have concerns as to whether appropriate measures are in place to ensure public safety in the event of a terrorist attack at PNPS. You also raised a number of other related issues.

Immediately after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the NRC issued an advisory to the licensees of all nuclear power plants and other nuclear facilities. The advisory advised licensees to establish the highest level of security, consistent with a set of predetermined measures for raising the security level at nuclear facilities. When the NRC issued the advisory, licensees were able to refer to the set of predetermined measures and to respond quickly to the threat environment.

The NRC is currently reevaluating all aspects of our safeguards and security programs. This reevaluation will consider pertinent information from other Federal law enforcement, intelligence, and military agencies, as well as our counterpart regulators in other countries. In addition, as part of the reevaluation, the NRC will consider the security-related issues that you raised, along with many other security-related issues. The NRC continues to monitor the security at all U.S. nuclear facilities, and has issued advisories to licensees to ensure that they take appropriate security measures.

You commented on an absence of communication on the part of agencies that are responsible for ensuring public safety. Subsequent to your letter, on October 29, 2001, U.S. Congressman William D. Delahunt and the Plymouth Board of Selectmen sponsored a public meeting to discuss plant security issues at PNPS. Representatives from the NRC, Entergy Nuclear Generation Company, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the U.S. Coast Guard, and local authorities and officials participated in the panel discussion. In particular, an NRC representative on the panel discussed measures that have been taken to enhance communications and security at nuclear power plants. Representatives from three of the major national media networks and local media were present, and members of the public addressed questions to the panel members during the meeting. In light of this meeting, the NRC does not believe that another public meeting is warranted in the PNPS vicinity regarding the security of the facility at this time.

You also urged the NRC to support the supply and distribution of potassium iodide (KI) to the public. In January 2001, the NRC revised a portion of its emergency response regulations to require that KI be considered as a protective measure for the general public in the event of a severe nuclear power plant accident. In doing so, the Commission found that KI is a reasonable, prudent, and inexpensive supplement to evacuation and sheltering for specific local conditions. The Commission left the final decision to the States as to whether the use of KI was warranted in light of the major role of the State in the preparation and implementation of emergency plans. The NRC has been working with several Federal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to resolve issues related to implementing a program for stockpiling and distributing KI. The NRC will proceed with implementing a KI distribution program for States that decide to include KI in their range of public protective actions, and the Commission will fund the initial purchases of KI for those States.

You also expressed concern that the PNPS licensee, Entergy Nuclear Generation Company, routinely tests emergency sirens without prior public notification. The licensee's normal practice is to inform the local media, as well as local fire and police departments, before testing the sirens. Such notifications make local officials aware of the scheduled tests and enable them to respond to concerns from the public when necessary. We recommend that calls to your organization regarding emergency siren activation be directed to the licensee's public affairs office.

You also asked about the schedule at PNPS for full-participation emergency exercises and whether FEMA has given full approval to the PNPS emergency response plan. PNPS conducted its most recent full-participation emergency exercise on December 7, 1999. The next such exercise is scheduled for May 22, 2002. I understand that FEMA has no significant concerns with the offsite portion of the PNPS emergency response plan.

You also urged the NRC to support the establishment of "no fly zones" over commercial nuclear power plants. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the FAA issued advisories to pilots to avoid flights near nuclear power plants. In addition, in response to alerts issued by Federal law enforcement agencies, the FAA has instituted temporary flight restrictions in the vicinity of nuclear power plants as the circumstances have warranted. No such restrictions are in place now.

With respect to your request that the NRC require nuclear plants to shutdown or reduce power during an "alert status," I note that the NRC and its reactor licensees have established protocols to ensure appropriate actions are taken in the event of a credible threat. The NRC, along with other Federal agencies, is prepared to assess any threat to a nuclear power plant and the best methods to provide sufficient protection.

Finally, you expressed concern that recent "credible threats" had been issued against the Three Mile Island (TMI) nuclear plant. When the NRC became aware of the threat to TMI, it was taken seriously. The TMI licensee instituted additional security measures, and Federal and State authorities took immediate actions. However, the intelligence community subsequently determined that the threat was not credible.

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I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact the NRC if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard A. Meserve