

March 12, 2002

Ms. Elinor Yahm
Clerk, Peace and Community Action Committee
Rockland Friends Meeting
148 Willow Tree Road
Monsey, NY 10952

Dear Ms. Yahm:

I am responding to your letter of December 20, 2001, to Mr. Richard Meserve, Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), forwarding a resolution by the Rockland Friends Meeting requesting the immediate closure of the Indian Point Nuclear Generating Unit Nos. 2 and 3 (Indian Point). The Rockland Friends Meeting made this request by stating that (1) Indian Point is an inviting target to terrorists, (2) the complex and interconnected system of reactors, spent fuel rods, storage structures, control rooms and electrical switching equipment presents multiple terrorist targets, and (3) an attack would have public health and environmental consequences. I regret the delay in replying to your letter. The NRC did not receive your letter until February 11, 2002, because our mail was detained due to increased precautions in handling mail sent to the Federal Government.

We, also, understand and recognize that many of our fellow citizens are concerned that a U.S. nuclear facility could be a target of future terrorist action. In view of the recent unprecedented events, Chairman Richard A. Meserve, with the full support of the Commission, has directed the staff to undertake a top-to-bottom review of our security regulations and procedures, including the basic assumptions of our current programs. This review involves U.S. national security organizations, and is part of a broader review being undertaken by the Federal Government. As you may be aware, the State of New York's Office of Public Security (OPS) worked with various Federal and State agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to assess the long-term security needs at Indian Point. As a result, OPS prepared a report that provided several recommendations to enhance security. Many of the measures suggested by OPS have been implemented by the licensee and others are currently under advisement.

As you may be aware, the NRC recently issued orders to all commercial nuclear power plants to implement interim compensatory security measures for the high-level threat environment. Some of the requirements formalize a series of security measures that NRC licensees had taken in response to advisories issued by the NRC, and others are security enhancements which have emerged from the Commission's ongoing top-to-bottom security review. The Commission decided to issue Orders because the generalized high-level threat environment has persisted longer than expected and, as a result, it is appropriate to maintain the security measures within the established regulatory framework. The details of specific additional security requirements are sensitive and will not be provided to the public, but they include such things as additional personnel access controls; enhanced requirements for guard forces; increased stand-off distances for searches of vehicles approaching nuclear facilities; and heightened coordination with appropriate local, State, and Federal authorities.

Although we cannot rule out the possibility of future terrorist activity directed at one of our licensee sites before implementing any potential enhancements to our safeguards programs,

we believe that these facilities can continue to operate safely. Nuclear power plants are inherently robust. Their design is based on defense-in-depth principles, and includes many features to protect public health and safety. For example, reinforced containment buildings and redundant safety systems would aid trained operators in preventing or limiting the release of radioactive material in the event of a terrorist attack. Therefore, in light of the facility's defense-in-depth, the heightened security measures implemented in response to the events of September 11th, and the NRC's ongoing reevaluation of its safeguards regulations and programs, we do not consider the immediate closure of Indian Point to be necessary to provide adequate protection for public health and safety.

Regarding the disposition of spent nuclear fuel currently on site, the NRC shares your concern about the safeguards and physical security of spent fuel. We believe that spent fuel can be safely stored at the Indian Point reactor site until it can be shipped to a centralized interim spent fuel storage facility or a permanent disposal facility. The current spent fuel storage pool designs were reviewed and approved by the NRC during initial licensing, and the construction and small size assist with physical security.

I appreciate your concerns and hope that you find this information useful. If you should have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at 301-415-1353 or Patrick Milano at 301-415-1457.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Elinor G. Adensam, Director
Project Directorate I
Division of Licensing Project Management
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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/RA/

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