

The Honorable Sandra R. Galef
New York State Assembly
Room 540, Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Assemblywoman Galef::

This letter is in response to your February 18, 2000, letter in which you requested that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission conduct a timely thorough examination of the past and current condition of the steam generators at the Indian Point 2 (IP2) Nuclear Plant following the steam generator tube leak on February 15, 2000. You also were concerned that local officials were not promptly informed of the Alert declared during the event.

The NRC formed an Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) at IP2 to determine what happened prior to, during and following the February 15, 2000, steam generator tube leak, including Consolidated Edison Co. (ConEd) implementation of emergency plan notification requirements. Also, the AIT will determine whether ConEd met its commitments for inspecting, maintaining, and monitoring steam generator tubes. We will provide you a copy of the AIT report as soon as it is completed.

In addition to the AIT, the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR) is conducting a review of the IP2 steam generators which will focus on steam generator inspections, problem identification, root cause analysis, and corrective actions. The NRC continues to conclude that steam generators can be safely operated without undue risk to the public. Operating experience to date has shown that significant steam generator tube leakage and tube failures have all involved only one steam generator tube at a time. Studies conducted to date by the NRC staff indicate that the potential for multiple steam generator tube ruptures is very low. NRC requires that margins against rupture be maintained for all tubes, and alternate repair criteria are reviewed to assure that the potential for one or more steam generator tube ruptures or leakage are kept low, consistent with the design basis of the plant. Nonetheless, whenever there is a steam generator tube failure, the NRC staff reviews its existing requirements to determine if any additional regulatory action is necessary.

The NRC has requirements for the operation, maintenance and monitoring of steam generators. This includes limiting steam generator leakage during plant operations. IP2 has had some steam generator tube leakage throughout the current operating cycle. However, the leakage rate was well below plant technical specification limits. Commercial nuclear power industry experience to date has shown that steam generator leakage at the low levels noted at IP2 prior to the February 15, 2000, event is typically not predictive of a tube failure. However, as noted above, when the root cause of the steam generator tube failure at IP2 is understood, the NRC staff will use that information to reassess its current requirements.

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Notifications required for events such as the February 15, 2000, steam generator tube leak are prescribed in federally-required emergency response plans established for each nuclear power plant. Coordinated but separate plans are established for government organizations involved in offsite response around each plant. Our understanding is that ConEd made the notifications of offsite officials specified in its "Emergency Response Plan for Indian Point Unit Nos. 1 and 2" that are required immediately after the declaration of an Alert. These notifications are federally required because they notify offsite emergency response organizations about the need to implement their plans. ConEd may not have been timely in making several notifications that it committed to make to local municipal officials. We are still reviewing this matter to better understand the concerns raised by the local officials.

Notifications of municipal officials of events at IP2 are prescribed in the local County Radiological Emergency Response Plans. Jurisdiction at the federal level for the review and approval of such offsite emergency response plans rests with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). ConEd officials have informed us that they intend to work with New York State, local counties and municipalities, and FEMA, as appropriate, to review lessons learned from this event. This will include an assessment of the notification process. We will provide support to this effort as needed.

In closing, the NRC has a number of ongoing actions regarding this event. Based on the findings of the AIT and the review by NRR, we will take appropriate actions necessary to ensure that adequate safety margins exist. We plan a number of outreach activities to the communities surrounding IP2 to aid in providing up-to-date and accurate information on this event. To this end, we tentatively plan a public meeting in the area during the week of March 13, 2000. We will inform you of the time and location of that meeting, as well as any other public meetings involving this event, when plans are finalized.

If you have any additional questions in this matter, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Meserve
Chairman

The Honorable Sandra R. GalefDistribution:

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