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Document Control Desk
ATTN: Chief, Planning, Program and Management Support Branch
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Spacer Grid Test Results

Framatome ANP was notified on March 8, 2002 of the results of spacer grid tests that had been conducted in France as part of an ongoing R&D program. In these tests, irradiated spacer grids were subjected to external loads to determine their strength relative to unirradiated grids. The tests show that the buckling strength of certain spacer grids used in some of Framatome's fuel assemblies decreases with increased radiation exposure. The NRC's current Standard Review Plan specifies that the strength of unirradiated spacers be used in applying bounding LOCA and seismic loads to demonstrate adequate resistance to such forces. These recent test results may put this assumption in question.

Framatome ANP has prepared a Condition Report on the matter. As part of the CR process, an extensive review of the tests and the test results has been initiated to determine their applicability to spacers currently in use in the United States and to analyze the effects of reduced buckling strength with increased radiation exposure. The review will also include consideration of any changes in ductility, spacer growth, spring resistance, natural frequencies, and other relevant factors that may also be a function of irradiation.

This evaluation will include a determination of safety significance under the provisions of 10CFR21.

Framatome ANP plans to make a determination of the safety significance of these test results by July 1, 2002. If the investigation is not completed by that time, a detailed interim report will be issued.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James F. Mallay'.

James F. Mallay, Director
Regulatory Affairs

/lmk

cc: D. G. Holland
Project 693

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