



UNITED STATES  
**NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**  
REGION IV  
611 RYAN PLAZA DRIVE, SUITE 400  
ARLINGTON, TEXAS 76011-8064

April 8, 2002

Rochelle Becker  
San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace  
P. O. Box 164  
Pismo Beach, California 93448

Dear Ms. Becker:

I am responding to the questions you asked Mr. Greg Pick of my staff by e-mail dated March 30, 2002. Your questions and our responses are provided below.

**Question 1:** How can the public trust the NRC to thoroughly and adequately review the storage process if they are not willing to stop the operation of plants that they know in advance are dangerous? I am referring to Davis-Besse where the NRC decided in February to allow the utility to continue operation even when leaking nozzles were identified.

**Response:** February 16, 2002, the Davis-Besse plant shut down to begin a refueling outage which included inspecting nozzles that enter the head of the reactor pressure vessel. The utility conducted the nozzle inspections because of commitments it had previously made to the NRC in response to NRC Bulletin 2001-01 issued in August 2001. The utility discovered degradation to the reactor pressure vessel head material as a result of these inspections while the plant was shut down. In accordance with a Confirmatory Action Letter issued to Davis-Besse on March 13, 2002, the plant may not restart without prior NRC approval. The NRC is conducting additional inspections to better understand the condition.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has established requirements which prohibit the operation of nuclear power plants with known reactor coolant system boundary leakage. The condition at Davis-Besse represents a very serious degradation of the reactor coolant system which could have resulted in a loss of reactor coolant accident. Although plants are designed to deal with a loss of coolant accident, this would lead to an unwanted challenge to systems and operators. The NRC has initiated prompt action to confirm that similar problems do not exist at other plants. The NRC issued Bulletin 2002-01, "Reactor Pressure Vessel Head Degradation and Reactor Coolant Pressure Boundary Integrity," on March 18, 2002. This required that each holder of operating licenses for pressurized water nuclear power reactors provide:

- (1) information related to the integrity of the reactor coolant pressure boundary including the reactor pressure vessel head and the extent to which inspections have been undertaken to satisfy applicable regulatory requirements, and
- (2) the basis for concluding that plants satisfy applicable regulatory requirements related to the structural integrity of the reactor coolant pressure boundary and future

inspections will ensure continued compliance with applicable regulatory requirements, and

- (3) a written response to the NRC in accordance with the provisions of Title 10, Section 50.54(f), of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR 50.54(f)) if they are unable to provide the information or they can not meet the requested completion dates.

Information about this ongoing issue is available on the NRC's Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/vessel-head-degradation.html>.

**Question 2:** Was the tractor/truck combination that blew over in Idaho March 29<sup>th</sup> approved for transportation of HLRW by the NRC? And if so, under what independently established criteria and guidelines? If not, why not.

**Response:** We have reviewed the information that you provided and determined that there was a similar incident that occurred on March 28, 2002, involving a tractor/trailer that was blown over by high wind conditions on Interstate 80 in Wyoming. The NRC was not notified about the incident and has no details regarding it. This is because the shipment involved Department of Energy activities, which the NRC does not regulate. Press accounts of the incident stated that no radioactivity was released and no one was injured in the accident. The press account does not indicate whether the shipment involved HLRW, only that the truck was hauling radioactive material. The shipment was headed to the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory from the former Fernald nuclear weapons plant. For information regarding the event, you should contact the Department of Energy at (202) 586-5806.

I will be leading the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's end of cycle assessment of Pacific Gas and Electric, Co. operation of Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plants on April 17 at the Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo, California, at 6:30 pm (PDT). This meeting is open to public observation and I will provide an opportunity for questions and comments from the audience prior to the end of the meeting.

Thank you for your interest in these matters. If I can be of assistance, please call me at (817) 860-8147.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

William B. Jones, Chief  
Project Branch E  
Division of Reactor Projects

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Rochelle Becker  
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3

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