

September 23, 2002

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) activities related to the Department of Energy's (DOE's) program to produce tritium in Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA's) Watts Bar and Sequoyah reactors. In my letter to you of September 20, 2001, I stated that the NRC had received TVA's request of August 20, 2001, to amend the Watts Bar Unit 1 license to permit the use of Watts Bar in this program. We have approved TVA's request to amend the Watts Bar Unit 1 license. The amendment permits TVA to insert up to 2304 tritium-producing burnable absorber rods (TPBARs) into the Unit 1 reactor and irradiate them for one fuel cycle (about 18 months). TVA will then remove the irradiated TPBARs from the fuel assemblies and ship them to a Tritium Extraction Facility at DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina. Under its arrangement with DOE, TVA will then insert new TPBARs in the Unit 1 reactor and repeat the process for the life of the plant.

TVA submitted a similar amendment request for Sequoyah Units 1 and 2 on September 21, 2001. The NRC staff expects to complete its review of that request on or about September 24, 2002.

The NRC staff held a public meeting with TVA and DOE on August 20, 2001, at NRC headquarters. During the meeting, DOE and TVA presented an overview of the program to produce tritium in commercial light-water reactors. The NRC staff also held a public meeting with TVA and DOE in Evensville, Tennessee, on October 2, 2001, and expects to hold another public meeting with TVA and DOE in Rhea County, Tennessee, on the evening of October 30, 2002. At this meeting, the NRC staff will explain the results of its safety evaluations of TVA's license amendment requests for Watts Bar and Sequoyah and answer questions for members of the public.

The NRC received three requests for hearings on TVA's license amendment requests. The NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board denied the requests. No appeals have been taken from the Board's denial of the requests.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard A. Meserve

cc: Senator Pete V. Domenici

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator Pete V. Domenici

The Honorable Carl Levin, Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator John Warner

The Honorable James M. Jeffords, Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator Robert C. Smith

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator Frank Murkowski

The Honorable W. J. "Billy" Tauzin, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative John D. Dingell

The Honorable Harry Reid, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Infrastructure,
and Nuclear Safety
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
cc: Senator James M. Inhofe

The Honorable Sonny Callahan, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative Peter J. Visclosky

The Honorable Bob Stump, Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative Ike Skelton

The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
cc: Representative Rick Boucher