December 24, 2002

Ms. Alexandra Jamieson
520 E. 11th St. #27
New York, NY 10009

Dear Ms. Jamieson:

I am responding to your letter of November 4, 2002, to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in which you expressed concern about the potential consequences of a terrorist attack on the Indian Point nuclear power facility. In particular, you stated that the plant cannot be defended against terrorist attack and that its emergency preparedness plan is inadequate to protect the public health and safety.

We 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. It is the NRC's mission to ensure the safe operation of licensed nuclear activities, including the protection of these activities against terrorist attack. Since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, the NRC has taken many additional actions to ensure the adequate protection of the nation's nuclear power plants, working in close coordination with the Office of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), other intelligence and law enforcement agencies, the Federal Aviation Administration, United States military, State and local authorities, as well as with the operators of the plants. In addition, Chairman Richard Meserve, with the full support of the Commission, has directed the NRC staff to undertake a comprehensive review of our security regulations and procedures, including the basic assumptions of our current programs.

Although there have been no credible threats to any commercial nuclear facility in the United States, the NRC advised plant operators, immediately following the September 11 attacks, to implement the highest level of security. Moreover, on February 25, 2002, the NRC issued Orders to all commercial nuclear power plants licensed to operate which mandated compensatory security measures. Some of the requirements formalized a series of security measures that NRC licensees had already taken in response to NRC advisories, and others are security enhancements which have emerged from the NRC's ongoing security review. Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc., the licensee for the Indian Point facility, has completed the required actions to fully comply with the Orders.

The State of New York (NYS) has further augmented security at Indian Point with National Guard personnel and State police. In addition, the NYS Office of Public Security (NYS OPS), working with various Federal and State agencies, including the FBI, has assessed the long-term security needs at Indian Point. The Office of Public Security report made a number of recommendations to enhance security which Entergy has either implemented or is considering. The NRC continues to work with other Federal and State agencies, and is monitoring all relevant information it receives on security matters at nuclear facilities. At the same time, the NRC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have been working with NYS OPS, State Emergency Management Office, and other State and local agencies to enhance coordination involving security and emergency preparedness and planning.

We cannot rule out the possibility of future terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants. However, we believe that, in the current environment, nuclear power plants provide adequate protection of public health and safety and can continue to operate safely. Nuclear power plants are inherently robust, are among the most hardened structures in the country, and are designed to withstand extreme events, such as hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes. Their design is based on defense-in-depth principles and includes many features to protect public health and safety. Reinforced containment buildings and redundant safety systems would allow trained operators to prevent or limit the release of radioactive material in the unlikely event of a terrorist attack or other disaster. In addition, all NRC licensees with significant radiological material have emergency response plans to mitigate the impact on the public in the unlikely event of a release. In light of the facility's defense-in-depth design, the heightened security measures that have been implemented, and the NRC's ongoing reevaluation of its safeguards and security programs, we do not consider the immediate closure of Indian Point to be necessary to protect the public health and safety.

NRC regulations require that comprehensive emergency plans be prepared and periodically exercised to assure that actions can and will be taken to protect citizens in the vicinity of a nuclear power plant. Emergency planning is based upon protection of the public from potential adverse radiological health effects that might occur as a result of an event at a nuclear power plant. The current emergency plans are designed to cope with a spectrum of accidents, from those with no releases to those with significant releases. Whether the event is the result of a terrorist attack or sudden catastrophic failure of plant equipment, the response would be driven, not by the initiating conditions, but rather by the actions necessary to reduce dose to protect public health and safety.

The NRC and FEMA are the two Federal agencies responsible for evaluating emergency preparedness at and around nuclear power plants. FEMA, with the assistance of the Regional Assistance Committee, a panel of experts in various aspects of emergency preparedness from a number of Federal agencies, periodically reviews these plans. These reviews consistently indicate that the emergency response plans for Indian Point provide a sound framework for effective decision making and implementation of essential emergency preparedness functions. While the emergency response plans have been found adequate, FEMA, the State, the counties, and Entergy are working closely on further enhancements. These enhancements consider such issues as the locations of school reception centers, traffic control contingencies, and potassium iodide distribution and use. The State plans also include protective measures to be used to prevent ingestion, such as interdiction of contaminated food or drink.

I trust that this letter addresses your concern over the safety of Indian Point. Thank you for your interest in these issues of importance to the Nation.

Sincerely,

***/RA/***

Stuart Richards, Director
Project Directorate I
Division of Licensing Project Management
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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