

December 30, 2002

Ms. Christine Kensicki  
63 Bald Eagle Road  
Hackettstown, NJ 07840

Dear Ms. Kensicki:

I am responding to your letter of October 29, 2002, to the Regional Administrator, Region I, of 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 and requested that the facility be closed. In particular, you forwarded a letter that you had sent to several elected officials stating that the plant cannot be defended against terrorist attack and that the evacuation plan is unworkable for the 10-mile emergency planning zone.

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.

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. The NRC and FEMA are the two Federal agencies responsible for evaluating emergency preparedness at and around nuclear power plants. Emergency planning is a dynamic process and, as a result, emergency response plans are periodically updated. 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.

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.

Regarding your reference to a report by the National Research Council, the purpose of the report was to describe ways in which science and engineering could contribute to making the nation safer from terrorism. As such, it acknowledged the NRC's ongoing technical analyses to understand the threat, vulnerabilities, and mitigation strategies, and the need to complete the studies expeditiously. The Council also recommended that follow-on work to identify plant-specific vulnerabilities be conducted after the initial studies are complete. Further, the Council indicated that the report only outlined relative threat levels. It ranked the relative threat level to nuclear power plants as high (scale of low to very high) based on the large number of plants. The Council recommended that if important vulnerabilities are found in the studies, steps be taken to reduce the vulnerabilities.

In your letter, you ask that the NRC not consider the financial interests of the licensee in our actions. Although the NRC does assess costs and benefits in its decision-making process, the NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate public health and safety, which guides our decisions. Through our threat advisories, Orders, and ongoing review of our security programs, we have taken and will continue to take actions to address the current threat situation.

C. Kensicki

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I trust that this letter addresses your concern over the safety of Indian Point. Thank you for writing to us about this important matter.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

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

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Sincerely,

*/RA/*

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