

March 28, 2003

Mr. Norm Cohen, Coordinator
The UNPLUG Salem Campaign
Coalition for Peace and Justice
321 Barr Avenue
Linwood, NJ 08221

Dear Mr. Cohen:

I am responding to the electronic mail (e-mail) transmission you sent to Robert Fretz of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC or the Commission) staff on February 14, 2003. In the e-mail, you expressed concerns about the leak in the Salem Nuclear Generating Station (Salem), Unit No. 1, spent fuel pool (SFP), and requested that the NRC provide assurance that the leak "will be fixed NOW, not in 15 years." In addition, you also inferred in your e-mail that the NRC attempted to cover up news of the leak by not reporting it to the public sooner. Although we believe the NRC staff's actions were appropriate, we have forwarded a copy of your e-mail to the NRC's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for their action as appropriate.

On September 18, 2002, PSEG Nuclear, LLC (PSEG or the licensee) identified contaminated water leakage in the Salem Unit No. 1 Auxiliary Building in the vicinity of the SFP. The licensee initiated an investigation in order to identify the source of the contaminated water. PSEG subsequently informed NRC resident inspectors on November 20, 2002, that, based on chemical and radiological analyses, the leakage appeared to be similar to Salem, Unit No. 1 SFP water concentrations. Because the leakage did not result in an immediate challenge to nuclear safety systems or public health and safety, PSEG did not need to submit a formal report to the NRC in accordance with Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 50.72, "Immediate Notification Requirements for Operating Nuclear Power Reactors." Our resident inspectors at Salem initiated a review of PSEG's actions and evaluations regarding the characterization of the leak in response to this information. In early December, senior regional specialists were sent to the site to provide additional expertise in evaluating the licensee's actions. As part of their review, the regional inspectors examined areas of the plant impacted by the SFP leak; verified that the collection devices installed by PSEG were directing SFP leakage to the radioactive waste system; and reviewed analytical data, including water samples from on-site environmental test locations. In ensuing site visits, the inspectors observed the licensee's actions relating to: (1) soil and water sampling; (2) drilling of permanent deep sampling wells; (3) SFP water make-up rate; (4) integrity of the fuel transfer canal; (5) sampling the water at the bottom of the SFP to evaluate radionuclide concentrations; and (6) monitoring for SFP water leaks. These activities were closely coordinated with representatives from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

On February 6, 2003, the licensee identified tritium in two shallow sample wells that were above the State of New Jersey's reporting requirement of 1,000 picocuries per liter (pCi/l). The wells were in close proximity to the Salem, Unit No. 1, spent fuel building, and within the plant's restricted area. PSEG promptly reported this discovery to State officials, and also notified the Commission on the same day of "a spill of radioactive material, specifically tritium," in accordance with NRC regulations (Event Report 39655). One of two samples that had prompted the initial report to the State was above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

and the State of New Jersey's ground water limit of 20,000 pCi/l; however, as of this date, PSEG has not identified any tritium in sample wells outside the plant's restricted area. As a result, the NRC has concluded that there is no immediate impact to plant workers, the public, or the environment associated with the discovery of tritium within the restricted area of Salem. The NRC will continue to monitor the licensee's actions to ensure the licensee effectively addresses the SFP leak within its corrective action program. In addition, if the NRC finds that the licensee is not in conformance with NRC regulations relating to offsite releases of radioactive effluents, the Commission will take appropriate action to further ensure the licensee restores the facility to a condition that continues to protect public health and safety.

In response to your concerns about the timing of repairs to the leak, PSEG retains full responsibility for timely and effective corrective actions, consistent with NRC regulations. As previously stated, PSEG has taken actions to identify the source and extent of the leakage, including the drilling of a number of sample wells and evaluating sample data. PSEG has also taken action to collect any further leakage and is directing it into plant waste systems. The licensee is closely monitoring the issue consistent with its corrective action program, and is also undertaking a number of activities associated with identifying permanent repair options to the SFP. The NRC will continue to evaluate PSEG's activities regarding the root cause for the leak and corrective actions.

The NRC's initial inspection activities are documented in the Salem quarterly inspection report (50-272/02/09) dated February 6, 2003 (ADAMS Accession No. ML030370750). Both the inspection report and the event notification report are available to the public through the Electronic Reading Room on the NRC's Web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm.html>, or for inspection at the Commission's Public Document Room, located at One White Flint North, 11555 Rockville Pike (first floor), Rockville, Maryland.

Based on its review, the NRC staff concludes that the licensee reported the SFP leak in accordance with NRC regulations; the results of samples taken from test wells to date show that the leakage does not present a public health and safety concern; and that the licensee is taking appropriate action to identify the extent of the leak, as well as permanent repairs to the SFP. I trust this letter responds to your concerns; however, if you have any questions, you may contact Robert Fretz, the Salem project manager, at (301) 415-1324 or at rxf@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

/RA/

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

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Stuart A. Richards, Director
Project Directorate I
Division of Licensing Project Management
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Docket No. 50-272

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