



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

February 24, 2000

CHAIRMAN

The Vice President  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I am writing to advise you of the unanimous decision of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) concerning the Technical Training Center (TTC) in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As you may know, the NRC staff in October 1999 forwarded for Commission consideration a proposal to decommission two of the four simulators now located at the TTC site and to move the facility to Rockville, Maryland. After carefully considering this proposal, the Commission has decided that it would be in the best interests of the agency to move the facility, including all four simulators, to Maryland.

The TTC is the primary training facility for the NRC and has been located at its current site since 1980. The 26 employees who are currently located at the site are responsible for conducting comprehensive technical training, including simulator training for our reactor program. When this facility was originally established, the Commission chose a location in Chattanooga for the TTC because of the site's proximity to reactor simulators owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Because the NRC did not own any simulators of its own at that time, the agency was dependent on use of the TVA simulators to conduct training for our inspectors and technical staff. Subsequently, the NRC has purchased a number of simulators for this facility and currently has simulators for plants designed by Combustion Engineering, Westinghouse, General Electric, and Babcock and Wilcox. We thus now have a capacity to co-locate the training operation with headquarters that we did not have when the Chattanooga facility was established.

In reaching its decision, the Commission has spent considerable time in evaluating the staff's proposal. As part of our deliberations, the Commission held a private meeting in late 1999 with a group of TTC staff and representatives of the National Treasury Employees Union to allow them to share their thoughts and concerns. Various members of the Commission held private meetings with representatives of the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce to listen to their concerns and provide them with an opportunity for input. Individual members of the Commission had personal discussions with Members of Congress regarding how the Commission should act on this issue. In addition, as the newest member of the Commission, I visited the TTC facility in December 1999 to form my own impressions of the facility, its staff, and its program of training.

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In making its decision, the Commission has focused on the option that would best further the health and safety mission of this agency. In particular, we assessed the most effective way to increase the level of training for our 2,800 member workforce. Our decision was not governed by cost considerations. In fact, as part of the effort to analyze this issue, the Commission determined that over a ten-year period there would be neither significant increased costs nor significant savings in moving the TTC.

The Commission's decision reflects our recognition that our headquarters staff in Rockville needs greater access to the reactor technology training resources currently in Chattanooga. As you know, this is a period of tremendous change for the NRC. Not only is the NRC embarked on extensive regulatory reforms, but also the nuclear power industry is changing to meet the challenges resulting from the deregulation of the electric industry. The Commission believes that, in order to meet the agency's many regulatory challenges, it is imperative that the agency establish a more robust technical training program in Rockville, where a majority of our workforce is located. In light of the fact that we have 1,900 members of our staff at our Rockville site, moving the TTC and its simulators to our headquarters will allow us to enhance our level of training for that group of staff who currently do not take full advantage of these facilities because of the travel involved.

The Commission also recognized that the rapidly changing regulatory environment and the emergence of new technologies will require our training staff to work more closely with NRC technical experts and to be more aware of current agency activities and perspectives in order to integrate these perspectives more easily into training courses. By having our technical training facility located in Rockville, with the resulting ability to utilize a wider range of technical experts as trainers, the quality of our training should be enhanced.

Finally, by placing the simulators in Rockville, we will have much greater access to these resources in the event of an accident at a plant. Quick access to these facilities by our lead technical experts could have a significant benefit in enabling the determination of the root cause of problems as well as allow us to formulate potential solutions.

We are mindful that the TTC has a 20-year history of successful operation in Chattanooga and that moving the facility will have some impact on the economy and will cause some disruption in the personal lives of TTC employees. These staff are a valuable agency resource that will continue to be needed in the future as the industry and the NRC proceed with license renewal and other regulatory initiatives. We have attempted to address these issues in fashioning an implementation plan that will minimize the impacts. TTC employees not directly associated with simulator support will be moved to the headquarters area by the end of FY 2001, while the simulators themselves and the remaining TTC personnel will remain in Chattanooga until at least mid FY 2003. Moreover, to ensure that the move does not impose any unnecessary personal burdens on the TTC staff, we have directed the NRC staff to take appropriate measures to meet the transitional needs of the TTC employees and their families.

Given the importance of this decision, I and the other members of the Commission would be pleased to meet with you regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard A. Meserve". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "M".

Richard A. Meserve