

UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR REACTOR REGULATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

March 28, 1997

NRC ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER 97-03: PLANT RESTART DISCUSSIONS FOLLOWING
NATURAL DISASTERS

Addressees

All holders of operating licenses or construction permits for nuclear power reactors.

Purpose

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is issuing this administrative letter to inform addressees about a recently adopted internal practice. This practice involves coordinating the assessment of offsite recovery and onsite restart activities following a natural disaster (hurricane, tornado, flood, storm, earthquake, etc.) where offsite damage may be substantial or undetermined. This administrative letter does not transmit or imply any new or changed requirements or staff positions. No specific action or written response is required.

Background

Numerous events have occurred in recent years in which natural disasters have affected power reactor facilities. Most notable of these is Hurricane Andrew and its impact on the Turkey Point Station. The licensee for the Turkey Point plant shut the reactors down in anticipation of the storm. Onsite damage from the hurricane was extensive. After that event, the licensee repaired the damage and was ready to restart the plant before the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure was ready to support the restart. An assessment of offsite conditions and infrastructure prior to restart was necessary to assure emergency preparedness in the event of a subsequent reactor accident.

Events have also occurred in which plants have shut down in anticipation of hurricane damage, which turned out to be minimal. Despite the absence of onsite damage, either some offsite damage occurred that affected the state of offsite emergency preparedness, or some damage occurred offsite such that the state of offsite emergency preparedness could not be determined immediately. For these cases, the NRC coordinated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the licensees involved to ensure that the restarts occurred after the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure could safely support them.

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Discussion

Although the overall responsibility for confirming the adequacy of radiological emergency preparedness of commercial nuclear power plants is vested with the NRC, it relies on FEMA's assessment of offsite emergency planning and response activities when carrying out this responsibility.

Section III of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between FEMA and the NRC, dated June 17, 1993, lists responsibilities for both agencies for cooperating in the recovery from a disaster that affects the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure surrounding power reactors. FEMA's headquarters (HQ) in Washington, D.C., is responsible for providing findings and determinations to the NRC concerning the adequacy of offsite preparedness in the areas surrounding power reactor sites following a severe natural event. FEMA HQ bases its assessment on information from State and local governmental authorities, as well as from the affected FEMA regional office and the NRC.

In two recent instances (Hurricane Bertha, July 1996 and Hurricane Fran, September 1996), FEMA HQ chartered special evaluation teams to assess whether the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure could support the restart of plants that had shut down in anticipation of hurricanes that affected the sites. These teams consisted of FEMA and NRC regional representatives, State and local emergency management representatives, and, in a limited capacity, power reactor licensee personnel. These teams provided assessments to FEMA HQ for its ultimate determinations that offsite emergency preparedness could support plant restart in both cases. The chartering of these special evaluation teams helped ensure a timely assessment of the condition of the offsite infrastructure and was based on experience gained with Hurricane Opal (October 1995) and the Quad Cities tornado (May 1996).

In some cases, a natural disaster may occur where onsite damage is minimal, but offsite damage may be substantial or undetermined. In these cases, the plant may be ready to start up shortly after the event. Communications in these cases between the licensee and NRC, the NRC and FEMA, and FEMA and offsite officials will be aggressive; however, stringent protocols will be observed to ensure that FEMA and the NRC operate within the guidelines of the MOU.

The NRC uses FEMA's determinations to inform power reactor licensees when the condition of the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure can support a reactor restart. The Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR), as well as NRC regional offices, have adopted a communication protocol that links key personnel in the two agencies and the affected licensee organization. An overview of this protocol is attached. Some of the key points of this protocol are:

1. NRC regional office personnel maintain close contact with the affected power reactor licensee to determine the state of onsite emergency preparedness and the plans for restart. The NRC regional office communicates this information rapidly to NRR.

2. FEMA regional office personnel maintain close contact with their evaluators in the field, the affected State and local emergency management officials, and the affected NRC regional office to determine the state of offsite emergency preparedness. The FEMA regional office communicates this information rapidly to FEMA HQ.
3. The final assessment that offsite emergency preparedness can support a power reactor restart originates from FEMA HQ.
4. A single individual in NRR serves as the point of contact with FEMA HQ to receive this assessment. The individual communicates this information rapidly to NRR management and the cognizant NRC regional office.
5. After the assessment from FEMA is received and discussed with NRR management, the NRC regional administrator informs the affected licensee that the condition of the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure can support a safe reactor restart.

The NRC has developed this protocol as a result of discussions with FEMA, as well as lessons learned from Hurricane Andrew and other events. The objective of this protocol is to ensure that aggressive and rapid information flow occurs between the involved organizations following natural disasters at power reactors. The NRC expects that the use of this protocol will ensure that the determination that the condition of the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure can support a reactor restart will be made before the licensee is actually ready to restart the reactor plant(s). In the event that the determination is not made before the licensee is ready to restart the plant(s), the NRC will evaluate the need to delay the restart through the issuance of an order or confirmatory action letter. By accomplishing this protocol, the licensee, FEMA, and NRC can provide for safe and rapid restarts of power reactors in the wake of these disasters and assure that the offsite emergency preparedness infrastructure can function as expected if called upon in an emergency.

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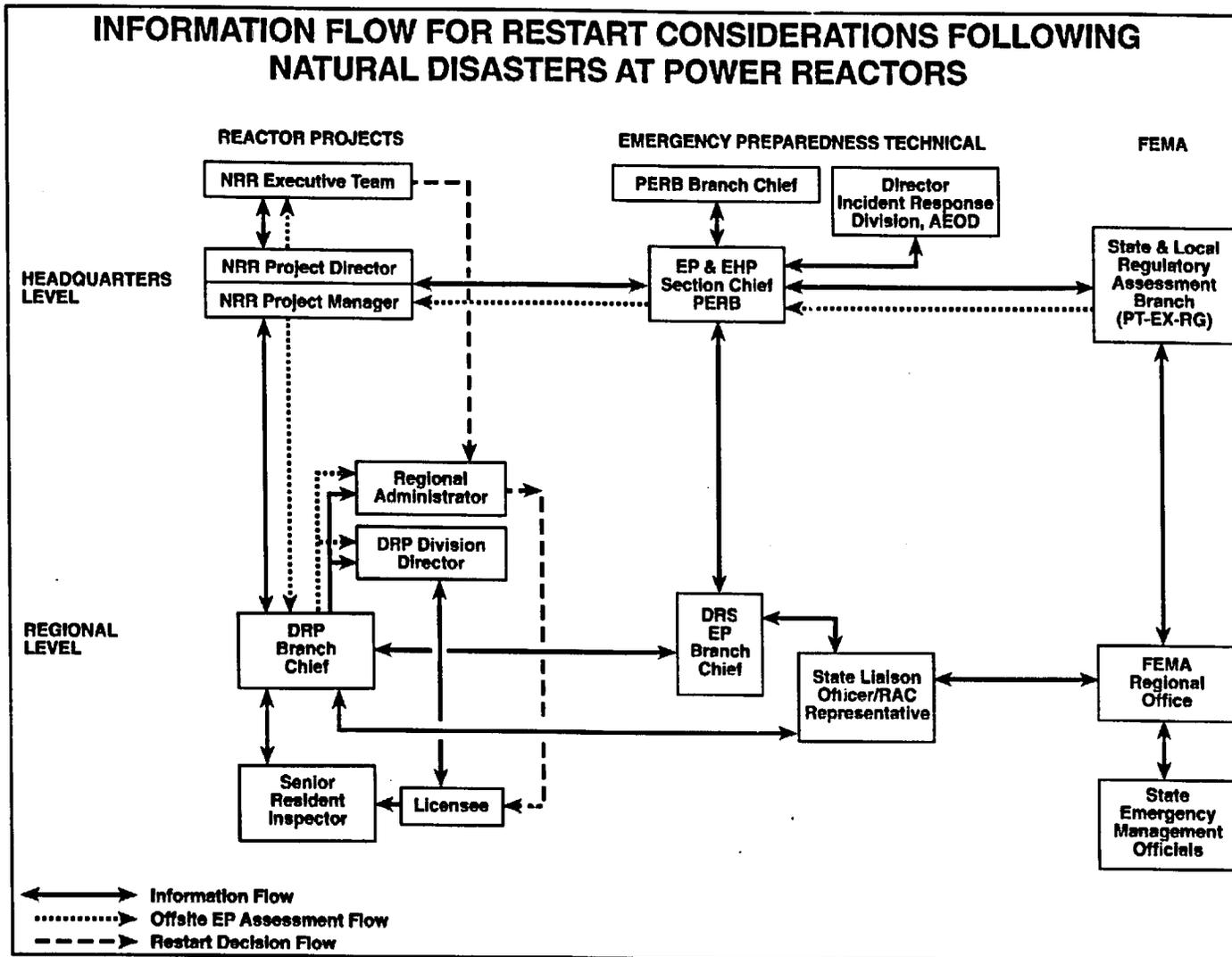


Thomas T. Martin, Director
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Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Contact: W. Maier, NRR
(301) 415-2926
E-mail: wam@nrc.gov

Attachments:

1. Information Flow for Restart Considerations
Following Natural Disasters at
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LEGEND:

AEOD - Office for Analysis and Evaluation of Operational Data
 DRP - Regional Division of Reactor Projects
 DRS - Regional Division of Reactor Safety
 EP&EHP - Emergency Preparedness and Environmental Health
 Physics Section, PERB/NRR
 FEMA - Federal Emergency Management Agency

NRR - Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation
 PERB - Emergency Preparedness and Radiation Protection
 Branch, NRR
 PT-EX-RG - State and Local Regulatory Assessment Branch, FEMA
 RAC - FEMA Regional Assistance Committee

LIST OF RECENTLY ISSUED
NRC ADMINISTRATIVE LETTERS

Administrative Letter No.	Subject	Date of Issuance	Issued to
97-02	Elimination of National Examination Schedule for Operator Licensing	03/06/97	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
97-01	State Initiatives to Legalize Schedule 1 Drugs	01/17/97	All holders of OLs or for nuclear power reactors and all licensees authorized to possess or transport Category 1 nuclear material
96-05	Compliance with the Rule "Timeliness in Decommissioning of Material Facilities"	11/05/96	All material and fuel cycle licensees
96-04	Efficient Adoption of Improved Standard Technical Specifications	10/09/96	All holders of OLs for nuclear power reactors who have not converted to the improved standard technical specifications
96-03	Centralization of Quality Assurance Program Review Responsibility in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation	09/27/96	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
95-03, Rev. 1	Availability of Reactor Vessel Integrity Database	07/10/96	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors
96-02	Licensee Responsibilities Related to Financial Qualifications	06/21/96	All holders of OLs or CPs for nuclear power reactors

OL = Operating License
CP = Construction Permit

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original signed by
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 Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Contact: W. Maier, NRR
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 E-mail: wam@nrc.gov

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DOCUMENT NAME: G:\WRT\EPADMIN.LTR

Tech Editor reviewed 10/24 OGC reviewed 11/6 FEMA reviewed 12/2

*SEE PREVIOUS CONCURRENCE OFFICIAL RECORD COPY

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