

June 10, 2003

The Honorable Sue W. Kelly
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Kelly:

On behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your April 29, 2003, letter in which you requested that the NRC thoroughly investigate the circumstances surrounding a fire that occurred at Indian Point 3 on April 29, 2003. The fire occurred in a non-nuclear portion of the plant (the turbine building) and never threatened any safety-related equipment. However, because of the time needed to completely extinguish the fire, Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc. (the licensee) declared an Unusual Event, the lowest emergency classification level.

The protection of nuclear power plants against fire hazards is an important aspect of our regulations and has long been a high priority with the NRC. These plants are required to minimize the potential for a fire to occur, maintain fire protection systems, and be ready to respond quickly to fires whenever they occur. Early detection of fires and the ability to dispatch the plant's fire brigade to respond to the scene of a fire is a key element of this readiness. NRC inspectors routinely review these fire protection features and NRC fire protection specialists periodically perform a comprehensive evaluation of the plant's fire protection program in accordance with our Reactor Oversight Process (ROP).

The April 29 fire occurred in a portion of main turbine insulation that had become oil soaked. The oil came from a leaking fitting and was not observed prior to plant startup. Plant operators detected smoke coming from the main turbine and reported the fire to the plant control room. Control room operators promptly took action to shut down the turbine and reactor and to dispatch the plant fire brigade to the scene. The fire was completely extinguished in less than an hour. However, because the fire lasted more than 15 minutes, Entergy declared an Unusual Event in accordance with its procedures.

As a matter of practice, any unplanned event that results in a plant shutdown, such as the fire that occurred at Indian Point 3, is thoroughly reviewed by our inspectors. The inspectors are carefully reviewing the circumstances that led to the oil leak that caused the fire and Entergy's subsequent actions. Although our final assessment of the event is not complete, we have determined that immediate actions taken by plant personnel were appropriate. Our review will be documented in the quarterly Indian Point 3 inspection report for the period ending in June. You are on the distribution for these reports and should receive your copy in August 2003. The quarterly Indian Point 3 inspection reports are publicly available on the NRC web page at http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/listofrpts_body.html, so the public can assess them at their convenience.

-2-

Please contact Mr. Hubert Miller in Region I if you have any further questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Nils J. Diaz