

July 3, 2003

Mr. Paul M. Blanch
135 Hyde Road
West Hartford, CT 06117

Dear Mr. Blanch:

In your letter to Chairman Diaz dated June 12, 2003, you requested an explanation of our May 30, 2003, letter to Congressman James C. Greenwood. In particular, you asked how we can justify our statement that "the staff does not use a 'voting process' for making decisions."

The Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR) decision making process utilizes the best available technical information and gives serious consideration to all factors and viewpoints. There are free and open discussions among the staff as the office develops its final position. During the November 28, 2001, meeting in question, the senior NRR manager sought to identify alternative views by asking for a show of hands. This was his way of ensuring that every staff opinion was considered. It was a step in the decision-making process, not the conclusion of it.

Within NRR, we foster an atmosphere where staff feel free to debate technical decisions. What the Inspector General characterized in his report on Case No. 02-035, as a "vote" was his description of how my staff debated the issues in order to reach a staff recommendation.

Considering the technical opinions of our expert staff and ensuring that these opinions are expressed is one of the ways we accomplish our mission to protect public health and safety. Safety is our priority and ensuring it is a job that we take seriously.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Samuel J. Collins, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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Samuel J. Collins, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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