



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

CHAIRMAN

December 24, 2003

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Boxer:

On behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am writing in response to your December 23, 2003, letter to me, urging that the NRC undertake an emergency inspection of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant following the December 22, 2003, earthquake that occurred approximately 35 miles northwest of the plant in San Simeon, California. In fact, following the earthquake December 22, both Pacific Gas & Electric company and our onsite NRC resident inspectors independently conducted inspections of the plant to assess any damage.

Immediately following the first shock, our NRC resident inspectors established a direct open telephone link between the station's control room and both NRC's headquarters office in Rockville, Maryland, and the NRC Region IV office in Arlington, Texas. This line was kept open by one of the two inspectors and information concerning the station's status was continuously provided to NRC staff.

Consistent with NRC requirements, an "unusual event" was declared at 11:22 a.m. PST. This is the lowest of the four level emergency classifications prescribed by NRC regulations. Within an hour, dozens of workers at Pacific Gas & Electric Co., (PG&E) began comprehensive examinations of the plant's foundation and of the station's structures, systems, and components to determine if they were damaged. These examinations were performed by PG&E operators and other engineering staff with extensive knowledge of the systems and components. While this work was underway, our resident inspectors performed their own independent inspection of the station's major safety systems, the plant foundation and plant structures, systems, and components to confirm that the licensee examinations were comprehensive and thorough and to make an independent assessment of potential damage. The NRC inspected the plant searching for broken, shifted or leaking pipes and their support braces; displaced equipment; cracks in cement walls and the plant's foundation and other signs of damage. No damage was observed by either the licensee's examinations or the NRC's inspection. As a prudent follow-up, the NRC plans additional inspections at the plant over the next several weeks. The results of these NRC inspections will be documented in an inspection report and we will send you a copy.

Diablo Canyon is constructed and licensed to withstand and operate during an earthquake more powerful than the one of December 22, 2003. In addition, as part of the original plant license, PG&E was required to implement a program to reevaluate the seismic design bases used for the Diablo Canyon Power Plant. This latest earthquake will be evaluated as part of that program.

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In addition to the actions taken in the past few days, PG&E has informed the NRC that it has formed an event review team. The team will review the actions taken by PG&E in response to the earthquake, develop lessons learned, and establish improvements if needed, for responding to these type of emergencies in the future. The NRC will closely monitor the team's activities, assess its findings and recommendations, and confirm through additional inspections that PG&E has implemented the team's findings. This inspection will also be documented in an inspection report that will be provided to you.

NRC shares your concern that nuclear power plants be operated in a safe manner to protect public health and safety. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Nils J. Diaz

