

May 28, 2004

Mr. Robert A. Mahler, Principal  
Gill School  
48 Boyle Road  
Gill, MA 01376

Dear Principal Mahler:

I am responding to your letter of March 31, 2004, to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). In your letter you expressed concern about emergency planning at and around the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (Vermont Yankee). You also expressed concern regarding the proposed power increase for Vermont Yankee.

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. In regard to your concern about the proposed power increase, the NRC will not approve the Vermont Yankee power increase, or any proposed change to any plant license, unless our technical staff can conclude that public health and safety will be assured. We have planned technical reviews and inspections regarding the Vermont Yankee power increase to address potential safety concerns for operating the plant at increased power. Our detailed technical review, coupled with the associated program of inspections, will provide us with the information we need to make a decision on the safety of operation of Vermont Yankee at increased power. I have enclosed a copy of our letter to the Vermont Public Service Board which provides additional information on our review process.

NRC regulations require that comprehensive emergency plans be prepared and periodically exercised to assure that actions can and will be taken to notify and protect citizens in the vicinity of a nuclear facility in the unlikely event of a radiological emergency. The NRC regulates the onsite emergency planning and requires nuclear plant operators to have detailed procedures for handling accidents, making timely notification to appropriate authorities, and providing accurate radiological information. Our oversight involves direct assessment of onsite emergency planning and preparedness of the facilities that we regulate, in addition to oversight of plant operations and security. At the Federal level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has the lead in offsite emergency planning and response for nuclear power plants. FEMA evaluates the offsite emergency planning and ensures that acceptable evacuation plans are in place.

Both the NRC and FEMA evaluated the most recent exercise at Vermont Yankee in April 2003, and both agencies determined that there is reasonable assurance that appropriate measures to protect the health and safety of surrounding communities can be taken and are capable of being implemented in the event of a radiological incident at Vermont Yankee.

In your letter you ask several questions about how people will respond when their own lives and the lives of their families are in danger. While I cannot tell you how individuals in your area will perform in an actual emergency, I can give you examples of how nuclear power plant emergency plans have been employed successfully during actual disasters. A portion of Cedar

Rapids, Iowa, is in the 10-mile emergency planning zone for the Duane Arnold Nuclear Power Station. Following a fire at a sewage treatment plant that spread a plume of toxic gases, it was necessary to evacuate part of the city. City officials credited the nuclear power plant emergency planning program for the success of this evacuation which involved some 10,000 people. In another case, part of St. Charles, Louisiana, was evacuated following a leak at a chemical plant. The Waterford 3 Nuclear Power Plant emergency plan was used to enable this evacuation which involved some 17,000 people. There had been a recent emergency planning exercise that had heightened community awareness of emergency plans and appropriate response. Yet another example comes from Pennsylvania where a fire at a metal plant necessitated that an area be evacuated of about 13,000 people. The Susquehanna Nuclear Power Plant evacuation plan was used to organize this effort. A final example comes from the city of San Luis Obispo, California, where approximately 3,000 people had to be displaced due to an out of control wildfire. The coordination between the response organizations, notification of the public, and successful evacuation were in large part due to the extensive emergency preparedness exercise program that was developed to support the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant.

Thank you for your interest in NRC activities. For current information on the NRC's review of the proposed power uprate, please see the Vermont Yankee webpage on the NRC's website at <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/plant-specific-items/vermont-yankee-issues.html>.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Cornelius F. Holden, Director  
Project Directorate I  
Division of Licensing Project Management  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure: Letter to the Vermont Public Service Board

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Sincerely,  
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 Cornelius F. Holden, Director  
 Project Directorate I  
 Division of Licensing Project Management  
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Enclosure: Letter to the Vermont Public Service Board

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