

May 27, 2004

Ms. Dorothy McIver
121 Conway Street
Greenfield, MA 01301

Dear Ms. McIver:

I am responding to your letter of March 30, 2004, to the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). In your letter you expressed concerns over the proposed power increase for the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant (Vermont Yankee). You also expressed concern over emergency planning at and around the Vermont Yankee site and about the possibility of a terrorist attack at Vermont Yankee.

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. 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 taken great care in preparing the proposed technical reviews and inspections regarding the Vermont Yankee power increase in order to ensure that these reviews and inspections will identify and 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.

You expressed concern that the proposed power increase at the plant would lead to increased radioactive discharges. Allowable radioactive effluents from commercial nuclear plants are dictated by Federal regulations. In order to ensure that these regulations are met, Vermont Yankee conducts a radiological effluent monitoring program. As part of this program, Vermont Yankee monitors and reports on radiation levels in river water and sediment as well as in fish, milk, and vegetation samples. Following any power increase, Vermont Yankee would continue this program and would be required to continue to meet Federal radioactive discharge standards.

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. The NRC assists FEMA in carrying out this role. 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 protective 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.

NRC regulations set high standards for safety and security programs at nuclear power plants and other sensitive nuclear facilities. Since the NRC's inception, security has been an important part of the NRC's regulatory activities, with defense-in-depth as the guiding design and operating principle. NRC regulations ensure that nuclear power plants are among the most hardened and secure industrial facilities in our nation. The many layers of protection include robust plant design features, sophisticated surveillance equipment, physical security protective features, professional security forces, and access authorization requirements. Together, these layers of protection provide an effective deterrence against potential safety or security problems related to terrorist activities that could target equipment vital to nuclear safety. Although there have been no specific credible threats against the nation's nuclear power plants, following the events of September 11, 2001, the NRC has taken a number of steps to improve the already high level of security, including more training for security guards and requiring additional guards at the plants. The effectiveness of these security program improvements has been verified by the NRC.

I reiterate that the NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. I would like to assure you that corporate and local economics do not factor into our decision-making process.

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

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/RA/

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