

May 27, 2004

Mr. Loren W. Kramer
14 Oak Street
Greenfield, MA 01301

Dear Mr. Kramer:

I am responding on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to your letter dated March 3, 2004, regarding the request by Entergy Nuclear Operations, Inc. (Entergy) to amend Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station's (Vermont Yankee) license to increase power by 20 percent. In your letter, you noted that the facilities at Vermont Yankee were not sufficiently hardened to protect against attacks. You also expressed concerns about the age and structural integrity of Vermont Yankee as it relates to the requested power uprate, and asked that the NRC deny Entergy's request, or at least conduct a comprehensive independent safety assessment prior to approval.

Regarding your concern about the plant's structural integrity in the case of an attack, the NRC has sought to ensure continued adequate protection of the Nation's nuclear power plants since the unprecedented events of September 11, 2001. The NRC has worked in close coordination with other Federal agencies (including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Energy, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Federal Aviation Administration), as well as with State governments, and the nuclear industry. We believe the enhancements to nuclear power plant security after the events of September 11, 2001, and the NRC's continuing oversight provide assurance for the continued safe operation of commercial nuclear facilities, including Vermont Yankee, in the current threat environment. In addition, even before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, nuclear power plants were considered among the best defended and most hardened facilities of the Nation's critical infrastructure.

You also raised concern about the age and condition of Vermont Yankee. Consistent with NRC regulations, Vermont Yankee was granted a 40-year operating license in 1972. NRC requires plant operators to continuously test and monitor the condition of safety equipment and to keep equipment in top condition. NRC has also required licensees to correct design deficiencies that could impact plant safety. While Vermont Yankee has been in operation since 1972, over the years, the licensee has replaced equipment and performed overhauls of other plant equipment. Where appropriate, the licensee has also upgraded or installed new equipment to replace or supplement original systems.

Regarding your concern for the need of an independent safety assessment at Vermont Yankee, I am enclosing, for your information, a letter that we sent to the Public Service Board on May 4, 2004, explaining the NRC's approach in addressing this issue. The NRC plans to use an improved engineering inspection at Vermont Yankee, as described in the enclosure. The NRC staff has concluded that a detailed technical review, combined with inspections prescribed by the reactor oversight process, as enhanced by a new engineering inspection, is the most effective means for our staff to determine whether Vermont Yankee can safely operate under

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uprated power conditions. The NRC will not approve the Vermont Yankee uprate, or any proposed change to a plant license, unless the NRC staff can conclude that the proposed change will be executed in a manner that assures the public's health and safety.

I believe the enclosed information, which describes our review and inspection procedure, along with our plans for a new engineering inspection process, will assist in addressing your concerns regarding the safety of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station. Additional information about the on-going review process is also available on our NRC website at: www.nrc.gov/reactors/plant-specific-items/vermont-yankee-issues.html

Thank you for your concern and interest in NRC activities.

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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/RA/

Cornelius F. Holden, Director
Project Directorate I
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Enclosure: Letter to the Vermont Public Service Board

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