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Peach
Bottom
MAR 17 1965

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Mr. John T. Conway
Executive Director
Joint Committee on Atomic Energy
Congress of the United States

Dear Mr. Conway:

The staff was previously informed orally by the AEC Office of Congressional Relations of a fire which occurred at the Philadelphia Electric Company's Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station. This letter is to report on the latest information we have obtained regarding the present status of the facility.

On Wednesday, February 3 at 12:10 p.m., a fire was discovered in one of the electrical cable penetrations at a location inside the containment building. It is believed that the fire was caused by sparks from an acetylene torch being used overhead for metal cutting. Attempts to extinguish the fire with portable equipment were started immediately by utility and contractor personnel. Heavy smoke from burning electrical insulation necessitated the use of breathing apparatus, which severely restricted access to the area of the fire. When visibility was reduced to about one foot, evacuation of all personnel from the containment building was directed. Subsequently, CO₂ gas was introduced into the closed building from a tank truck which had been dispatched from Aberdeen Proving Ground to the site. Following introduction of the CO₂, it was determined that the fire had been extinguished. In addition to the assistance provided by Aberdeen, other units which responded to the emergency included the Delta, Pennsylvania and Bel Air, Maryland fire departments.

No radioactive material was involved in the fire. The nuclear fuel to be used in the reactor was at the site but was stored in a separate building outside the containment. There were no injuries to personnel.

Factual accounts of the fire were carried on local radio news reports and by the news services. The AEC Division of Public Information used the above information to respond to inquiries.

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Actual fire damage was limited to the insulation burning off of approximately 850 electrical cables, principally those entering twelve of the fourteen cable penetrations on one side of the containment building, and to one local control board inside the building. The burning insulation deposited a heavy coat of soot on surfaces inside the containment building. In addition to replacing the burned cables, cleanup of the soot has constituted a major part of the work resulting from the fire.

The Division of Compliance reactor inspector who last visited the site on March 8-9, 1965 reported that cleanup of the soot from surfaces inside the containment building was complete. The interior of the building had been repainted down to ground level. Examination of equipment was in progress to determine the extent of damage from smoke and soot to control boards, relays, instruments and other delicate equipment.

The licensee is doing extensive work to determine what changes in plant design or modifications to equipment should be made as a result of the fire experience. Those already planned include the procurement of replacement cable having a butyl rubber inner sheath rather than polyethylene; the relocation of installed CO₂ nozzles to cover cable penetration areas as well as areas where oil might constitute a fire hazard; and the installation of covers on open cable trays. Other changes may result from the reviews now in progress.

The procurement of replacement cable appears to be the limiting item in the schedule for repair work at the plant. A firm schedule depends upon the delivery date of the replacement cable. Also, decisions must be made regarding the necessary extent of the retreating of the containment building and its cable penetrations and the need for repeating the performance of certain preoperational tests of instrumentation and control systems. The licensee has advised that a tentative schedule has been developed and will be released shortly. This provides for completion of all repair work by June 1 and for final completion of construction at the plant by July 31, 1965. A period of final plant checkout and preoperational testing will follow to last for six weeks. On this basis, fuel loading is scheduled to begin about September 15, 1965.

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We will continue to follow any subsequent developments in scheduling and the Committee will be informed of significant changes.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Harold L. Price

Harold L. Price
Director of Regulation

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