

September 23, 2005

The Honorable John F. Kerry
United States Senator
One Bowdoin Square
Tenth Floor
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Senator Kerry:

I am responding on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to your letter dated August 12, 2005, by which you forwarded a letter from Ms. Susan Klein-Bernett expressing her opposition to the proposed power uprate at the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (Vermont Yankee). Specifically, Ms. Klein-Bernett raised concerns regarding a recent electrical switchyard event at Vermont Yankee. She also asked your support in requesting the NRC to conduct a thorough study of the proposed power uprate.

With respect to the concern regarding the electrical switchyard event, on July 25, 2005, Vermont Yankee automatically shut down when an electrical insulator broke. The insulator was on one of three switches that connect the plant's main transformer to the electrical grid. When the insulator broke, instrumentation detected that the main transformer was no longer connected to the electrical grid and sent a signal to automatically shut down the electrical generator and reactor. All safety systems responded as designed for the plant conditions.

Based on a forensic examination, the root cause of the insulator failure appears to be the result of an undetectable crack along with a manufacturing defect in the insulator at the location of the crack. The insulator was replaced and the plant restarted on July 28, 2005. The plant had been online continuously for 385 days at the time of the shutdown.

Regarding Ms. Klein-Bernett's request that the NRC conduct a thorough review of the proposed power uprate for Vermont Yankee, to date, the NRC staff has spent more than 7,000 hours reviewing the licensee's analysis and justification for the proposed change. In addition to the technical review being performed, the staff has spent more than 900 hours inspecting changes associated with the proposed power uprate. The NRC staff has not yet made any decision regarding the acceptability of this change to the facility.

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. The NRC will not approve the Vermont Yankee power uprate, or any proposed change to any plant license, unless our technical staff can conclude that adequate protection of public health and safety will be ensured. We have taken great care in conducting the technical reviews and inspections regarding the Vermont Yankee power increase in order to ensure that these reviews and inspections will identify and address any potential safety concerns for operating the

J. F. Kerry

- 2 -

plant at uprated power conditions. 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 the proposed power level.

I hope that this letter satisfactorily addresses the concerns of your constituent.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Luis A. Reyes
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: Ms. Susan Klein-Bernett

J. F. Kerry

- 2 -

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Luis A. Reyes
Executive Director
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cc: Ms. Susan Klein-Bernett

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