

March 13, 2006

Mr. Kenneth R. Balkey, Vice President
Nuclear Codes and Standards
American Society of Mechanical Engineers
Three Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016-5990

Dear Mr. Balkey,

By letter dated December 20, 2005, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff requested that the ASME Boiler and Pressure Vessel Code (ASME Code), Section XI, take actions necessary to develop needed improvements to the existing ASME Code inspection requirements for managing primary water stress corrosion cracking in dissimilar metal (DM) butt weld connections in reactor coolant pressure boundary (RCPB) piping. In response to this request you indicated in your letter of February 17, 2006, that the ASME Code, Section XI, Task Group on Alloy 600 will move forward to develop a code case providing appropriate examination frequency requirements for DM butt welds in RCPB piping.

The NRC appreciates the actions taken by ASME to reach this decision to revise the inspection requirements for DM butt welds. In your letter you noted the importance of input from cognizant industry representatives in developing the technical basis for the code case. We share this view. Willingness to assist in the development of the code case and its technical basis, including resolution of any proprietary concerns, was affirmed by representatives of the industry's Materials Reliability Program during the senior management meeting held at the NRC on February 22, 2006.

NRC staff actively participated on the Task Group on Alloy 600 in its work to develop ASME Code Case N-729 on reactor vessel upper head control rod drive penetrations. The NRC staff will continue to be actively involved on the task group as it develops this new code case and its technical basis.

The Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) recently sent a letter to the NRC (ML060610761) that deals, in part, with the role of the ASME Code in ensuring the integrity of pressure retaining components. This topic is of great interest to the NRC, including the aspect of ensuring leakage integrity. We would be interested in discussing this topic further with representatives of the ASME and NEI and with other interested stakeholders.

K. Balkey

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Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions you have on this matter.

Sincerely,

/RA/

John A. Grobe, Director
Division of Component Integrity
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

cc: A. Marion, Senior Director of Engineering, Nuclear Energy Institute
G. Park, Chairman, ASME Subcommittee on Nuclear Inservice Inspection
J. Ling, Associate Executive Director, ASME Codes and Standards
K. Ennis, Director, Nuclear Codes and Standards
P. McCullough, V.P. Accreditation, Institute of Nuclear Power Operations
G. L. Vine, Executive Director, Washington Representative, EPRI
R. L. Dyle, Southern Company
M. Robinson, Chair, MRP Issue Integration Group
J. Gasser, Executive Chair of PWR Materials Management Program
D. Modeen, Chief Nuclear Officer, Electric Power Research Institute

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D. Modeen, Chief Nuclear Officer, Electric Power Research Institute

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