

April 6, 2006

Ms. Virginia Flowers
617 Hill Point Dr.
Etters, PA 17319

Dear Ms. Flowers:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am writing in response to your letter of March 20, 2006, in which you asked about measures the NRC is taking to ensure safety at Three Mile Island Nuclear Station (TMI).

The NRC's primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety by regulating the 104 licensed nuclear power reactors in the United States. Your letter referred to the accident at TMI Unit 2 in March 1979, which was the most serious in U.S. commercial nuclear power plant operating history, even though it led to no deaths or injuries to plant workers or members of the nearby community. The problems identified from careful analysis of the events during those days have led to permanent and sweeping changes in how NRC regulates its licensees – which, in turn, has reduced the risk to public health and safety.

Today, we regulate reactor operations through a combination of activities. These activities include writing regulatory requirements with input from interested members of the public; licensing both the companies that own reactors and the individual employees at the controls; and carrying out a broad program of safety oversight, including inspection and enforcement. For example, two of our employees work full-time at TMI as resident inspectors and act as the public's eyes and ears at the plant. This same level of oversight is provided for all of the nuclear plants licensed to operate by the NRC. We evaluate safety concerns, including those expressed by members of the public, and ensure that the nuclear plant operator fixes problems promptly.

Your letter also expressed concerns about plant aging and license renewal. Consistent with NRC regulations, the licensee for TMI was granted a 40-year operating license in 1974. NRC regulations permit licenses to be renewed for up to 20 additional years. If TMI's owner applies for license renewal, we will review the application to decide whether plant components and the surrounding environment can support the additional years of operation. The NRC requires licensees to maintain safety equipment in reliable operating condition and correct design deficiencies that could impact plant safety. Over the years, the licensee has periodically upgraded and replaced aging plant equipment. Regardless of its age, TMI must comply with NRC regulations that protect the health and safety of the public.

Regarding your comments about recent news coverage of TMI, the NRC is looking into fitness-for-duty issues such as fatigue and sleeping on the job. Because these concerns are security-related, we cannot release the results of our review. We must ensure that we are not unnecessarily releasing sensitive information to the public domain that would reveal any potential security-related vulnerabilities. However, the matter is being tracked to resolution by our Region I office in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

V. Flowers

-2-

Thank you for your interest in these important matters. I hope you find the information in this letter useful. For more information on the NRC's regulations, inspections, and allegation program, I encourage you to explore our public website at <http://www.nrc.gov>.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Darrell J. Roberts, Chief
Plant Licensing Branch I-2
Division of Operating Reactor Licensing
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

V. Flowers

-2-

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Sincerely,

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-2-

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