

May 12, 2006

Mr. Alexander Marion
Senior Director, Engineering
Nuclear Generation Division
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006-3708

Dear Mr. Marion:

I am responding on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC's) Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research (RES) to your letter of February 28, 2006, concerning collaborative research on materials engineering issues. In your letter you highlight our shared goal of ensuring that the agency's materials engineering research programs do not unnecessarily duplicate those of the industry so as to maximize the resources to support such research. You also point to certain NRC activities that are underway and indicate that you believe these activities are contrary to this goal.

As you note in your letter, at the conclusion of the January 17, 2006 public meeting between representatives of industry and RES, both parties agreed to pursue development of a collaborative research program potentially using such vehicles as the NRC and Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) Memorandum of Understanding. We tentatively planned a follow-on meeting in the Spring of 2006, and agreed the time between meetings would be used by both the industry and the NRC to respectively complete the Issue Management Tables, and the NUREG on the Proactive Materials Degradation Assessment. We also agreed that during the future meeting we would compare our results and our understanding of the risk significance of susceptible components to develop a prioritized list of research activities that we would consider performing collaboratively. The NRC has not taken any steps to begin such proactive research and will not do so without first investigating the option of collaboration. We have of course continued to make progress on our programs already underway to develop technical bases for regulatory decision making requested by the Offices of Nuclear Reactor Regulation and Nuclear Materials Safety and Safeguards. At the future meeting, we would like to discuss the possibility of performing some of this work planned for fiscal year 2007 collaboratively.

With regard to our efforts to organize an international program on proactive materials degradation management, we believe this to be consistent with our shared goal of maximizing the number of organizations interested in performing such research. As directed by the Commission in the staff requirements memorandum from the February 6, 2006 meeting on materials degradation issues and fuel reliability, we are continuing to pursue international collaboration. An example of a vehicle by which this collaboration can be established has been presented by Dr. Joseph Muscara of my staff in three previous planning meetings, including one recently held in Charleston, South Carolina on May 11-13, 2006.

A. Marion

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If you would like to propose alternative means of organizing this collaboration, then I suggest we discuss them at the Spring 2006 meeting. The final form of this collaboration will depend on the needs and views of all participating parties.

If you have any further questions regarding these matters, please contact me or Dr. Jennifer Uhle, of my staff. Dr. Uhle can be reached at (301) 415-5686 or at jxu1@nrc.gov. We look forward to our mutual advancement of proactive materials research programs.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Brian W. Sheron, Director
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

CC: R. Jones, EPRI

A. Marion

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Brian W. Sheron, Director
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

CC: R. Jones, EPRI

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(RES File Code) RES _____