

July 19, 2006

Jean Sward
23 Dowitcher Way
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Ms. Sward:

Your letter to President Bush concerning nuclear energy has been forwarded to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a response. We appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns with regard to the safety of nuclear energy.

As you may know, Congress authorized the civilian use of nuclear materials, including nuclear power plants, through the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 and subsequent revisions. The Act included regulatory authority to ensure the public receives the benefits of nuclear power, in the form of electricity, while remaining protected from radiation hazards. Congress strengthened the regulatory function by establishing the NRC, which began operations in 1975. The NRC has the responsibility to license and regulate the Nation's commercial nuclear power plants in a manner that ensures adequate protection of public health and safety and promotes the common defense and security.

The NRC has a system of strict safety regulations on the design, construction, operation, and decommissioning of nuclear plants that must be satisfied before a plant can be built and operated. As long as a utility can demonstrate that a nuclear power plant can be operated safely within the NRC's regulations, the agency is required to license the plant.

Commercial nuclear power plants, under the NRC's oversight, have operated safely in the United States for more than 40 years. The Three Mile Island accident, while the worst in the history of U.S. nuclear power, led to no deaths or injuries to plant workers or members of the nearby community. An accident like Chernobyl is extremely unlikely to occur at U.S. commercial nuclear power plants for a number of reasons, including differences in plant designs and containment structures. By any objective, practical measure, nuclear power plants in the U.S. are safer today than at any other time.

Nuclear power plants are among the most robust and well-protected civilian facilities in the country. These structures are designed to withstand extreme events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes. The NRC took security at nuclear power plants seriously well before September 11, 2001, and has moved quickly and aggressively to enhance security in light of the increased threat.

The events of September 11 have resulted in additional protections at nuclear power plants and enhanced coordination with federal, state, and local organizations responsible for protecting critical national infrastructure to ensure that these commercial facilities remain secure. Security enhancements put into effect since September 11 include increased patrols, augmented

security forces and capabilities, additional security posts, installation of additional physical barriers, vehicle checks at greater stand-off distances, enhanced coordination with law enforcement and military authorities, more restrictive site access controls for all personnel and expanded, expedited, and more thorough employee background checks.

New reactor designs have enhanced systems to safely shut down the reactor and to mitigate the effects of a hypothetical accident. The NRC will conduct a careful, thorough safety and environmental review for any new plant application received and will involve the public. We will ensure that any new plant will be safe and secure. At the same time, we will continue our vigilance over currently operating nuclear facilities.

Until a high level waste repository is available in the United States, spent nuclear fuel continues to be stored safely in specially designed, water-filled pools at individual reactor sites around the country. Spent fuel is also stored in steel and concrete "dry casks" that are safe and environmentally sound. Over the last 20 years, there have been no radiation releases which have affected the public, nor has there been radioactive contamination from dry casks.

The NRC takes its responsibilities seriously and will continue its commitment through strong regulation to protect the American public.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Eliot B. Brenner
Director, Office of Public Affairs

Letters received between April 3, 2006 and May 1, 2006 from the following individuals to The President concerning nuclear energy.

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