

October 20, 2006

Mr. David Lochbaum, Director
Nuclear Safety Project
Union of Concerned Scientists
1707 H Street NW Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006-3919

Dear Mr. Lochbaum:

Thank you for your letter dated September 12, 2006, in which you raised concerns regarding the timeliness of reactor licensee submittals of NEI Ground-Water Protection Initiative (GPI) baseline information to the NRC. You also questioned whether licensees were providing adequate radiological postings and controls for areas affected by spills and leaks of radioactive liquids at nuclear power plants.

As you pointed out in your letter, the nuclear industry established a goal for having a plan in place for implementation of the GPI at all sites as of July 31, 2006. As part of the voluntary initiative, each power plant site or company was to submit to the NRC a completed questionnaire on historical spills and leaks. While the majority of the questionnaires were submitted to the NRC during the last week of July, six (6) licensees provided the information after July 31, 2006. During the month of August, NRC staff electronically scanned all questionnaires and placed them into ADAMS. They are currently available on the NRC's public web page under the links for "Ground Water Contamination (Tritium)" and "Plant Information."

Your letter also questioned licensee compliance with the 10 CFR 20.1902(a) posting requirements for radiation areas. These posting requirements are intended to warn personnel of a 5 mrem in one hour potential external radiation hazard to aid in minimizing exposures. However, the NRC is unaware of any leaks and spills reported by licensees, that had dose rates exceeding 5 mrem in an hour, and were not properly posted.

Similarly, the purpose of 10 CFR 20.1902(e) requirements is to warn personnel of a potential hazard due to used or stored radioactive material (such as equipment or radioactive sources). However, radioactive material in effluents, including spills and leaks, is not considered used or stored material. Additionally, since there is no external public exposure hazard from tritium in soils or water, there is no need to post these areas.

On October 4, 2006, the NRC released to the public the findings of the Liquid Radioactive Release Lessons Learned Task Force, concerning inadvertent, unmonitored releases of radioactive liquids, containing primarily tritium. The full report is available on the NRC's website <http://www.nrc.gov>; click on "Ground-Water Contamination (Tritium)." This report includes recommendations for NRC staff actions with regard to ground-water contamination.

D. Lochbaum

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The NRC's mission is to ensure the protection of the public health and safety. While these leaks and spills have caused public concern, the task force concluded that there have been no leaks or spills identified to date that have caused a public health impact. The NRC will continue evaluating and assessing spills and leaks from licensee operations and take action as necessary to ensure the continued public health and safety.

Sincerely

/RA/

J. E. Dyer, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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