

March 14, 2007

Mr. Dennis M. Miotla  
Deputy Director for Nuclear Operations  
Office of Nuclear Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave., S.W.  
NE-2.3/Germantown Building  
Washington, DC 20585-1290

Dear Mr. Miotla:

In a recent industry workshop, you asked whether the Nuclear Regulatory Commission would be interested in potentially using the Advanced Test Reactor (ATR), a major materials test reactor. Historically, the ATR has been operated by Department of Energy to address nuclear fuel and materials issues related to national security and energy research and development. The ATR has made significant contributions in these areas.

Under the correct circumstances, we believe the ATR operating as a national user facility would provide high value-added services to industry and academic research communities. We participated with you in the ATR Industry Workshop held on January 17, 2007, to help define the conditions required for a successful user facility for the nuclear industry.

In our view, the primary conditions that need to be available from the ATR user facility include:

1. Competitive pricing of irradiations, post-irradiation examinations and a complete spectrum of engineering and technical support from the ATR staff
2. Ease of doing business with regard to contracting (e.g., appropriate management of conflict of interest issues)
3. Tight schedule and cost management with high technical quality
4. Acceptance of waste generated by experiments and services
5. State of the art in-pile and in-cell test and examination techniques

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If these conditions can be met, we believe the ATR could provide irradiations and examinations of nuclear fuel and materials used in both current and future generation commercial nuclear facilities. Under such conditions, NRC would consider use of this facility, if appropriate, to meet its nuclear regulatory research needs.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Brian W. Sheron, Director  
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

cc:

Mr. John Grossenbacher  
Laboratory Director  
Idaho National Laboratory  
2525 Fremont Avenue  
Idaho Falls, ID 83415-1303

Ms. Elizabeth D. Sellers  
Manager  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Idaho Operations Office  
850 Energy Drive  
Idaho Falls, ID 83401

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Ms. Elizabeth D. Sellers  
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U.S. Department of Energy  
Idaho Operations Office  
850 Energy Drive  
Idaho Falls, ID 83401

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