April 5, 2007

Karen M. Scott, M.D.
50 James Street
Greenfield, MA 01301

Dear Dr. Scott:

On behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter to Senator Kerry, in which you expressed concerns regarding the renewal of the Vermont Yankee operating license, recently approved power output increase, local emergency planning, and general safety of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (Vermont Yankee). Our agency, the NRC, was created by Congress as an independent Federal agency with regulatory oversight for civilian use of nuclear power. Our mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety, promote common defense and security, and protect the environment. For more information on the NRC’s oversight role, please see our web site at www.nrc.gov.

The NRC is currently reviewing the license renewal application for Vermont Yankee. In this regard, the NRC conducts safety and environmental reviews to ensure that the licensee maintains plant safety by adequately managing aging effects and maintaining safety-related structures, systems, and components to the present plant design requirements. The license renewal process involves extensive audits, inspections, public meetings, and safety and environmental evaluations. Through this process, the NRC ensures that safe operation will be maintained and the environment will be protected. Before the NRC can issue a renewed license, the agency ensures that the basis for granting a renewed license is technically credible and legally sufficient. The NRC considers the technical basis as reflected in the agency’s safety evaluation report, final environmental impact statement supplement, and the licensee’s proposed renewed license submittal.

The NRC staff spent more than 11,000 hours reviewing the Vermont Yankee application to increase the plant’s power. The staff reviewed the licensee’s analysis and justification for the proposed change. The staff evaluated the tests that the licensee performed while increasing reactor power to the uprated power conditions. The tests were conducted at pre-determined power levels and power was not increased until the test results were demonstrated to be satisfactory. In addition, the staff spent a significant number of hours inspecting plant modifications associated with the proposed increase in power output. The NRC concluded that the Vermont Yankee power output increase met all required safety criteria and environmental protection criteria. Finally, the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS) has reviewed this power output increase application, including holding a public meeting in Brattleboro, Vermont on November 15-16, 2005. The ACRS is an independent committee, with members appointed by the NRC Commissioners largely from academic organizations or national laboratories. Based on their review, the ACRS recommended that the Vermont Yankee power uprate be approved. The NRC staff’s safety evaluation dated March 2, 2006, is available through the NRC’s Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) which can be accessed from the NRC web site. The ADAMS accession number of this document is ML060050028.
In regards to your question on evacuation plans for radiation leaks, the NRC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have regulations which provide for State and county participation in emergency response in case of an accident at a nuclear plant. Depending on the severity of the accident and other factors, the response may involve evacuation or other options such as taking shelter. Each year a calendar is provided to residents who live within a 10-mile radius of the plant with information regarding the emergency plans for Vermont Yankee. Even if you live farther than 10 miles from the plant, you may obtain a copy of the calendar from the State of Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Web site at http://www.mass.gov/Eeops/docs/mema/2007_vermont_yankee_calendar.pdf. For specific details on emergency preparedness for your local community, you may wish to contact your local emergency management office for information on emergency plans in your area.

With respect to your general safety concerns, the licensee for Vermont Yankee was granted, consistent with NRC regulations, a 40-year operating license in 1972. The NRC requires licensees to test and monitor the condition of safety equipment and to maintain that the equipment is reliable and in good operating condition over the operating life of the plant. The NRC also requires licensees to correct deficiencies that could impact plant safety. Testing, monitoring, maintenance, and replacement of plant equipment helps ensure that this equipment will perform its intended safety functions. Over the years, the licensee has replaced, upgraded or overhauled plant equipment as needed. Where appropriate, the licensee has also installed new equipment to supplement original systems.

The NRC’s primary mission is to ensure adequate protection of public health and safety. In this regard, the NRC monitors the licensee’s performance and compliance with regulatory requirements with onsite resident inspectors and region-based inspectors through the NRC’s Reactor Oversight Process. The NRC will continue to monitor and provide regulatory oversight for all ongoing and future activities at Vermont Yankee within our jurisdiction. I trust that this letter satisfactorily addresses your concerns.

Sincerely,

/RA Martin J. Virgilio Acting for/

Luis A. Reyes
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: The Honorable John F. Kerry
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Luis A. Reyes
Executive Director
for Operations

cc: The Honorable John F. Kerry
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