

EDO Principal Correspondence Control

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FINAL REPLY:

Senator Thomas R. Carper

TO:

Chairman Jaczko

FOR SIGNATURE OF :

** PRI **

CRC NO: 09-0517

Chairman Jaczko

DESC:

NRC's Efforts to License New Nuclear Reactors
(EDATS: SECY-2009-0460)

ROUTING:

Borchardt
Virgilio
Mallett
Ash
Mamish
Burns/Gray
Schmidt, OCA
Burns, OGC
Diaz-Toro, OEDO
Rihm, OEDO

DATE: 10/19/09

ASSIGNED TO:

CONTACT:

NRO

Johnson

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OR REMARKS:

Please prepare rseponse in accordance with OEDO Notice 2009-0441-01 (ML090490315). You may also refer to the ADAMS Congressional Correspondence Folder to help in preparing response.

OEDO POC: Roger Rihm (415-1717)

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EDATS

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OEDO Due Date: 11/3/2009

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OCM Concurrence: NO

OCA Concurrence: NO

Special Instructions: Please prepare response in accordance with OEDO Notice 2009-0441-01 (ML090490315). You may also refer to the ADAMS Congressional Correspondence Folder to help in preparing response.

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AUTHOR: SEN Thomas Carper
AFFILIATION: CONG
ADDRESSEE: CHRM Gregory Jaczko
SUBJECT: Concerns NRC's efforts to license new nuclear reactors

ACTION: Signature of Chairman
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EDO --G20090601

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0803

October 15, 2009

The Honorable Gregory Jaczko
Chairman
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

As our Nation moves toward a low-carbon energy economy, the United States will need to start building new nuclear reactors in the near future to help meet our climate and energy demands. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) ongoing efforts to license new nuclear reactors will play an important role in helping build a new domestic nuclear fleet. I want to thank you for your leadership and for the work that the NRC has already done to make the license review process more efficient while endeavoring not to detract from the agency's primary safety mission.

Over the past two decades, Congress has made it easier for nuclear reactors to be licensed and has provided incentives for utilities to start building. As you know, in the Energy Policy Act of 1992, Congress provided a new streamlined nuclear licensing process, which combined the construction permitting process with the operating permitting process. This new method gave incentives for utilities to choose a standardized design and allowed completed plants to operate without delay if construction criteria were met. In the 2005 Energy bill, Congress also provided new incentives for new nuclear builds, which prompted a flurry of applications submitted to the NRC for new nuclear licenses, the first seen by the agency in thirty years. The combined license procedure is now being used to process the new license requests. Meanwhile, Congress has also authorized 1,000 new NRC employees to help accommodate the new workload of the agency.

Having said that, a number of my colleagues and some stakeholders recently have shared with my staff and me their belief that the NRC is taking too long to process new nuclear reactor licenses. As a result, I am writing today to seek information about an important part of the combined license application process—ensuring that the NRC receives and accepts complete and high quality applications. I am concerned that the NRC may be spending valuable staff resources on applications that have not been fully completed by industry in some instances. I would appreciate receiving a report from the NRC that includes statistics on the number of incomplete applications docketed by the NRC along with information on how incomplete applications and other information missing from industry may be slowing down the licensing processes.

I would urge the NRC to examine its acceptance review of combined license applications prior to docketing to ensure that the submittals are ready for NRC staff's full technical review. I also urge the agency to consider whether additional guidance is needed for utilities and vendors in order to better ensure complete and high quality applications.

Again, the NRC's commitment to make the combined license review process more efficient without sacrificing safety is greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing your views on this matter within the next few weeks and, possibly, to scheduling a subcommittee hearing later this year that allows our subcommittee to hear further from the NRC on these matters, as well as to hear the views of representatives from the utility industry and from those whose business is the design of next generation nuclear power plants. Thank you in advance for your timely response.

With best personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,


Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator