

June 10, 2010

Hans J. Kaufman, Jr.
9858 Windsor Lk. Blvd.
Columbia, SC 29223-2028

Dear Mr. Kaufman,

Thank you for your letter of May 24, 2010, in which you requested information regarding the formation and authority of the NRC.

In 1946, Congress created the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), a body that was established by the Atomic Energy Act of that same year. When that law was replaced less than a decade later by the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, Congress assigned the AEC the responsibility of both encouraging the use of nuclear power commercially, and regulating its safety. The AEC's regulatory program was therefore required to ensure public safety without crippling the new nuclear industry.

Critics during the 1960s claimed that the AEC's regulations were insufficiently rigorous in several important areas, such as radiation protection standards, reactor safety, plant siting, and environmental protection. By 1974, the controversy over the AEC had grown to such an extent that Congress decided to abolish the agency altogether. Supporters and dissenters alike agreed that promotional and regulatory duties should be split between agencies. In 1974, the Energy Reorganization Act split these functions, assigning to one agency (now the Department of Energy) the responsibility for the development and production of nuclear weapons, promotion of nuclear power, and other energy-related work, and assigning to the NRC the regulatory work, which does not include regulation of defense nuclear facilities. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission began operations on January 19, 1975.

The mission of the NRC is to license and regulate the United States' civilian use of byproduct, source, and special nuclear materials in order to protect public health and safety, to promote the common defense and security, and to protect the environment. An effective approach enables the U.S. to use radioactive materials for beneficial civilian purposes while still protecting the citizens and the environment.

Today, the NRC's scope of responsibility includes regulation of: commercial nuclear power plants; research, test, and training reactors; nuclear fuel cycle facilities; medical, academic, and industrial uses of radioactive materials; and the transport, storage, and disposal of radioactive materials and wastes. The NRC is also preparing to evaluate new applications for nuclear

power plants. In the last few years, utilities have submitted 17 applications for licenses to build 26 new power reactors, and more are anticipated to follow.

I hope this response is helpful to you. Further information on both the NRC's history and its current scope of authority can be found on the agency's website at <http://www.nrc.gov>. I have also enclosed a popular brochure: "A Short History of Nuclear Regulation, 1946-1999." If you have any further questions, please contact me or NRC's Office of Public Affairs.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Beth Janbergs
Office of Public Affairs

Enclosure: As stated