

April 21, 2011

The Honorable Edward J. Markey  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Markey:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letters of March 11, 15, and 18, 2011, which raised a number of important questions and concerns regarding recent events in Japan and their implications for the continuing safety of nuclear power plants in the United States.

Japan is still focused on bringing the nuclear events and their ramifications under control. The NRC's Emergency Operations Center continues to monitor and assess events, and to provide expert assistance and review. We are focused on meeting the near-term technical and information needs of the Japanese Government, various components of the Executive Branch, Members of Congress, and the American public, while ensuring there is no reduction in the domestic licensing and oversight functions of the NRC. The NRC will be prepared to share a complete and accurate summary of events in Japan when the immediate crisis is over and we obtain more complete and verified information over time.

We expect that decisions regarding our domestic regulatory program based on lessons learned from the events in Japan will be made over the course of the next 6 – 9 months. During this time, the NRC staff has established, in accordance with the Commission's March 23rd direction, a senior level task force to conduct a methodical and systematic review of our processes and regulations to determine whether the agency should make additional improvements to our regulatory system. This activity will have both near-term and longer-term components.

For the near-term effort, the task force is beginning a 90-day review. This review will evaluate the currently available information from the Japanese events to identify immediate or near-term operational or regulatory issues potentially affecting the 104 operating reactors in the U.S., including their spent fuel pools. Areas of investigation will include the ability to protect against natural disasters, response to station blackouts, severe accidents and spent fuel accident progression, radiological consequence analysis, severe accident management issues and emergency preparedness. Over this 90-day period, the NRC staff will develop recommendations, as appropriate, for changes to inspection procedures and licensing review guidance, and will recommend whether generic communications, orders, or other regulatory requirements are needed. This 90-day effort will include a briefing of the Commission after approximately 30 days to provide a snapshot of the regulatory response and the condition of the U.S. reactor fleet based on information available at that time.

The NRC's longer-term review will begin as soon as the NRC staff has sufficient technical information from the events in Japan, with a goal of commencing no later than the completion of the 90-day near-term report. The task force will evaluate all technical and policy

issues related to the events to identify any additional potential research, generic issues, changes to the reactor oversight process, rulemakings, and modifications to the regulatory framework that should be pursued by the NRC. A report with appropriate recommendations will be provided to the Commission within 6 months after the start of this evaluation. Both the 90-day and final reports will be made publicly available in accordance with normal Commission processes.

With those plans in place and underway, we also are currently pursuing prudent actions, even though we do not yet have all the details we need to fully assess the implications of the Japanese events for the U.S. reactor fleet. Specifically, we have begun inspection activities through temporary instructions to our inspection staff, including the resident inspectors and the region-based inspectors in our four Regional offices, to look at licensees' readiness to deal with both design basis accidents and beyond-design basis accidents. We have also issued an information notice to our licensees to make them aware of the events in Japan. Nuclear power plant licensees are voluntarily verifying that their capabilities to mitigate conditions that result from severe accidents, including the loss of significant operational and safety systems, are in effect and operational. The NRC will take additional actions that we believe to be appropriate as our understanding of the events in Japan becomes clearer.

In your letter of March 18<sup>th</sup>, you requested that we provide Congress and the public with a daily "situation report" or other similar document providing various updated information on the impacted facilities in Japan. I understand that the NRC Office of Congressional Affairs has begun providing that information to your office. To inform the public, we have prominently placed on the NRC webpage a link to "NRC's Actions on Japan's Emergency." This link, which is updated regularly, provides a range of information that includes Congressional testimony, Commission meeting transcripts, news releases, and Frequently Asked Questions. It also includes links to additional information on the web sites of a number of U.S. Government agencies and other organizations.

Let me assure you that our ongoing monitoring of events in Japan and review of all available information leads us to conclude that U.S. plants continue to operate safely. Let me also assure you that our review of this ongoing and dynamic situation will be systematic and methodical. We will take whatever actions are determined necessary in light of the information we receive.

I want to reiterate that we continue to view our domestic responsibilities for licensing and oversight of the U.S. licensees as our top priority and that U.S. nuclear plants continue to operate safely. I look forward to being able to provide you with additional information as it becomes available. If you have any additional questions, please contact me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

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Gregory B. Jaczko