

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
CORRESPONDENCE CONTROL TICKET

Date Printed: Mar 30, 2011 14:54

PAPER NUMBER: LTR-11-0170 **LOGGING DATE:** 03/30/2011
ACTION OFFICE: EDO
AUTHOR: SEN Barbara Boxer
AFFILIATION: CONG
ADDRESSEE: PRES Barack Obama
SUBJECT: Expresses comment regarding the safety of U.S. nuclear power plants
ACTION: Information
DISTRIBUTION: RF
LETTER DATE: 03/18/2011
ACKNOWLEDGED: No
SPECIAL HANDLING: Ref: Ltr-11-0148
NOTES:
FILE LOCATION: ADAMS
DATE DUE: **DATE SIGNED:**

To: Roger Rihm, OEDO
Ref: G20110190
G20110188

Cys:
EDO
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DEDR
DEDCM
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OIP
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Template: SECY 017

E-RIDS: SECY-01

105/801

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

BETHINA POHNER, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
RUTH VAN MARK, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

March 18, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Thank you for your efforts to provide all necessary assistance to the Japanese government as it struggles to address the catastrophic and heartbreaking impacts of a massive earthquake and tsunami. My thoughts and prayers, as well as those of the American people, go out to all citizens of Japan, and especially to the families of the thousands of disaster victims.

In light of the tragic events unfolding in Japan, I commend you for calling on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to conduct a comprehensive review of the safety of all nuclear power plants in the United States. I share your view that public safety is the federal government's top priority, and that a full evaluation of all U.S. nuclear facilities should be conducted immediately.

As the NRC commences its comprehensive review, I believe that it is critically important to focus immediately on all plants subject to significant seismic activity or located near a coastline, on the 54 plants that were licensed prior to 1980, and on those plants licensed after 1980 that share similar characteristics as the compromised reactors in Japan.

After the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee was briefed this week by the NRC Chairman, Dr. Gregory Jaczko, Senator Tom Carper and I sent a letter requesting that the NRC conduct a prompt and comprehensive investigation of all of the nation's nuclear facilities to assess their capacity to withstand catastrophic natural or man-made disasters. The letter to Chairman Jaczko (attached) asks the NRC to respond to specific questions about plant design and operations, type of reactor, and preparedness to withstand an earthquake or tsunami. Senator Feinstein and I also sent a letter (attached) to the NRC regarding two reactors in the State of California.

I look forward to working with you to protect the health and safety of the American public by ensuring that the nation's nuclear facilities are as safe and secure as possible.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works

BARRARA BOXER, CALIFORNIA, CHAIRMAN

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-8175

BETINA FORDHEI, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
RUTH VAN MARK, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

March 17, 2011

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

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

The loss of life and physical damage that Japan sustained in last week's devastating earthquake and subsequent destructive tsunami is catastrophic and heartbreaking. Our thoughts and prayers, as well as those of the American people, go out to all citizens of Japan and especially to the families of the thousands of disaster victims.

As this tragedy continues to unfold, we encourage the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and other U.S. agencies to continue to coordinate fully with the Japanese government to assess the status of public safety in light of the reactors' failures and to provide all technical assistance required.

The earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan are chilling reminders that we are all vulnerable to unexpected disasters, whether they are an act of nature or a terrorist attack. While we cannot predict with any certainty when or where the next major disaster will occur, we know that adequate preparation and response planning are absolutely vital to minimize injury, death, and destruction when it does happen.

As the Committee with oversight responsibilities on nuclear safety, we believe it is important to assist Japan to ensure that this nuclear disaster is contained as quickly and effectively as possible. For the long term, the multiple simultaneous failures of backup coolant systems at nuclear reactors in Japan are a clear warning that we must step up efforts to ensure that every precaution is taken to safeguard the American people from a similar incident at a U.S. nuclear facility.

Therefore, we call on the NRC to conduct a comprehensive investigation of all nuclear facilities in the United States to assess their capacity to withstand catastrophic natural or man-made disasters including scenarios that may be considered remote like the recent events in Japan. These domestic nuclear reactors must be fully evaluated to ensure that they are as safe and resilient as possible, that worst case scenarios are examined and addressed, and that personnel training and equipment for emergency responses are in place and up-to-date. Special and immediate attention should be given to those U.S. nuclear reactors that share similar characteristics as the failing reactors in Japan, including similar designs or located near a coastline or seismic fault line.

In addition to updating the EPW Committee on a regular basis, we also request that the NRC supply information to the committee as soon as possible regarding the following issues:

1. Please identify all U.S. nuclear facilities subject to significant seismic activity and/or tsunamis.
2. U.S. nuclear power plants are designed to be safe based on historical data of the area's maximum credible threat (including earthquakes and tsunamis). What extra safety features does the NRC currently require for facilities that have a credible threat of an earthquake and/or tsunami? In light of the recent events in Japan, we would also like the NRC to re-examine the assumptions used to determine the maximum credible threat and suggest additional options that could provide a greater margin for safety at plants nationwide that might be subject to challenges similar to those currently being seen in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami.
3. Which U.S. nuclear power plants share similar design features with the affected Japanese reactor facilities? Do these facilities have design vulnerabilities that should be addressed to ensure their cooling systems do not fail when confronted by stresses including those similar to what we have seen in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami?
4. How comprehensive is the radiation monitoring system in Japan? Would the U.S. take a similar monitoring approach if a serious accident were to occur here? What increased risk is associated with exposure to mixed oxide fuel?
5. Given what has happened at the Japanese facilities, please describe how the NRC currently ensures the safety of spent fuel pools at U.S. facilities and identify additional steps the NRC could take to better address the vulnerabilities of spent fuel pools at plants in the U.S.
6. Has the NRC modeled what could happen if the U.S. had multiple nuclear accidents simultaneously? If so, how would the NRC respond to such a disaster?

Safety is always our number one priority, and therefore it is vital that the NRC immediately evaluate the risks posed to nuclear reactors in the United States. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the nuclear energy industry and NRC regulators are adequately prepared to prevent accidents and to fully address the risks of serious events in the future.

Sincerely yours,



Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Committee on Environment and
Public Works



Tom Carper
Chairman
Subcommittee on Clean Air and
Nuclear Safety

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2011

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

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

The unfolding nuclear disaster in Japan has raised questions about the safety of nuclear power plants here in the U.S. As Senators from California, we are particularly interested in the safety of San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, located in San Clemente, and the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant near San Luis Obispo, both of which are near earthquake faults.

Roughly 424,000 live within 50 miles of the Diablo Canyon and 7.4 million live within 50 miles of San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. Although many safety measures have been taken to address potential hazards associated with these facilities, we need to ensure that the risk is fully evaluated.

For example, a 2008 California Energy Commission report presented very clear warnings of potential threats at both of these plants. This report found that the San Onofre plant could experience "larger and more frequent earthquakes" than the maximum 7.0 magnitude earthquake predicted when the plant was designed. It is our understanding that the NRC has not taken action to address these warnings in the report. It is also our understanding that the 2008 report found that there is an additional fault near the Diablo Canyon plant that should be taken into consideration as part of NRC's relicensing process. We want to know if the NRC will address all of the threats, including seismic threats, described in the 2008 report at these facilities.

We ask that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) perform a thorough inspection at these two plants to evaluate their safety and emergency preparedness plans.

In addition, we ask the NRC to answer the questions below regarding plant design and operations, type of reactor, and preparedness to withstand an earthquake or tsunami and other potential threats.

Plant Design and Operations

1. What changes to the design or operation of these facilities have improved safety at the plants since they began operating in the mid-1980s?
2. What emergency notification systems have been installed at California nuclear power plants? Has there ever been a lapse of these systems during previous earthquakes or emergencies?
3. What safety measures are in place to ensure continued power to California reactors in the event of an extended power failure?

Type of Reactor

1. What are the differences and similarities between the reactors being used in California (pressurized water reactors) and those in Japan (boiling water reactors), as well as the facilities used to house the reactors, including the standards to which they were built and their ability to withstand natural and manmade disasters?

Earthquakes and Tsunamis

1. We have been told that both Diablo Canyon and San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station are designed to withstand the maximum credible threat at both plants, which we understand to be much less than the 9.0 earthquake that hit Japan. What assumptions have you made about the ability of both plants to withstand an earthquake or tsunami? Given the disaster in Japan, what are our options to provide these plants with a greater margin for safety?
2. Have new faults been discovered near Diablo Canyon or San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station since those plants began operations? If so, how have the plants been modified to account for the increased risk of an earthquake? How will the NRC consider information on ways to address risks posed by faults near these plants that is produced pursuant to state law or recommendations by state agencies during the NRC relicensing process?

3. What are the evacuation plans for both plants in the event of an emergency? We understand that Highway 1 is the main route out of San Luis Obispo, what is the plan for evacuation of the nearby population if an earthquake takes out portions of the highway and a nuclear emergency occurs simultaneously?
4. What is the NRC's role in monitoring radiation in the event of a nuclear accident both here and abroad? What is the role of EPA and other federal agencies?
5. What monitoring systems currently are in place to track potential impacts on the U.S., including California, associated with the events in Japan?
6. Which federal agency is leading the monitoring effort and which agencies have responsibility for assessing human health impacts? What impacts have occurred to date on the health or environment of the U.S. or are currently projected or modeled in connection with the events in Japan?
7. What contingency plans are in place to ensure that the American public is notified in the event that hazardous materials associated with the events in Japan pose an imminent threat to the U.S.?

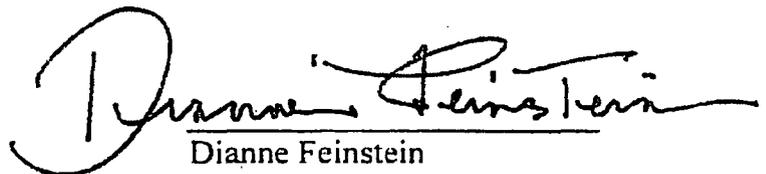
The NRC was created in the mid-1970s specifically to ensure the protection of public health and safety with regard to civilian nuclear power. The Commission plays an essential role ensuring that we learn from nuclear accidents and near misses. We hope you agree that we must identify whatever lessons are to be learned from the disaster in Japan in order to make facilities in the United States as safe as possible.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the safety of our nation's nuclear power plants and to make the changes necessary to ensure a nuclear tragedy does not occur in this country.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer



Dianne Feinstein

**THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE
REFERRAL**

March 23, 2011

TO: NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

ACTION COMMENTS:

ACTION REQUESTED: APPROPRIATE ACTION

REFERRAL COMMENTS:

DESCRIPTION OF INCOMING:

ID: 1051807

MEDIA: LETTER

DOCUMENT DATE: March 18, 2011

TO: PRESIDENT OBAMA

FROM: THE HONORABLE BARBARA BOXER
UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

SUBJECT: EXPRESSES COMMENT REGARDING THE SAFETY OF U.S. NUCLEAR POWER
PLANTS

COMMENTS:

PROMPT ACTION IS ESSENTIAL -- IF REQUIRED ACTION HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN WITHIN 9 WORKING DAYS OF RECEIPT.
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