May 26, 2011

Dr. Nicholas R. White
9 Spy Rock Hill
Manchester, MA 01944

Dear Dr. White:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter to Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko, dated March 20, 2011, about the questions you posed to Chairman Jaczko and the NRC with the suggestion that they be answered publicly.

Thank you for the questions. As we continue to develop public questions and answers (Q&A), we will consider including your questions. Please see our expanded Q&A available on our public Web site (http://www.nrc.gov/japan/japan-info.html) through the link "Expanded Q&A on Japan Event." This document was posted after the date of your letter and does address spent fuel. I believe you will find questions similar to some of the ones you have asked.

We are not able to answer all of your questions at this time. For example, question #7 asks what passive reactor facility design features would have helped at Fukushima. The NRC is waiting until further technical information about the event at Fukushima is known before answering questions of this nature. The NRC will also not publicly elaborate on information that is proprietary or security controlled information.

Let me assure you that the NRC's ongoing monitoring of the events in Japan and our review of all available information lead us to conclude that U.S. plants continue to operate safely. The Commission established a senior-level task force to conduct a methodical and systematic review of NRC processes and regulations to determine whether the agency should make enhancements to our regulatory system. This activity will have both near-term and long-term components. The task force is conducting a 90-day review to evaluate all of the currently available information from the Japanese events to identify any immediate or near-term operational or regulatory issues that could potentially affect the 104 operating reactors in the United States, including their spent fuel pools.

Areas of the task force's review for operating reactors and their spent fuel pools will include the ability to protect against natural disasters, response to station blackouts, emergency preparedness, combustible gas control, radiological protection, and severe accident management issues. Over this 90-day period, the NRC staff will develop recommendations, as appropriate, for enhancements to inspection procedures and licensing review guidance, and it will recommend whether generic communications, orders, or other regulatory requirements are necessary. This 90-day effort will include public briefings every 30 days to the Commission to provide a snapshot of the task force's considerations based on information available at that time. The next public briefing is currently scheduled for June 15, 2011.

The task force's long-term review will begin when the NRC staff has sufficient technical information on the events in Japan; our goal is to start this review 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 the NRC should consider. The task force will submit a report with appropriate recommendations to the Commission within six months after the start of this evaluation. Both the 90-day near-term report and the final report will be made publicly available in accordance with normal Commission processes. The reports will also be provided to the Commission's Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards for its independent review.

With those plans in place and underway, the NRC is also currently pursuing verification and inspection activities that appear to be prudent even though we do not yet have all the details necessary to fully assess the events in Japan. Specifically, the agency has started to enhance inspection activities through two temporary instructions to our inspection staff, to look at licensees' readiness to deal with both design-basis and beyond-design-basis accidents, and the availability and readiness of licensee's severe accident management guidelines. The NRC also issued two transmittals to licensees. Information Notice 2011-05, "Tohoku-Taiheiyou-Oki Earthquake Effects on Japanese Nuclear Power Plants," dated March 18, 2011, was sent to licensees to make them aware of the events in Japan and the kinds of activities in which the NRC believes they should engage to confirm their readiness, such as 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. NRC Bulletin 2011-01, "Mitigating Strategies," dated May 11, 2011, was sent to licensees to require them to provide a comprehensive verification of their compliance with the regulatory requirements of Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR) Section 50.54(hh)(2). Section 50.54(hh)(2) requires licensees to develop and implement guidance and strategies intended to maintain or restore core cooling, containment, and spent fuel pool cooling capabilities under the circumstances associated with loss of large areas of the plant due to explosions or fire. If needed, the NRC will take additional prompt appropriate actions as our understanding of the events in Japan becomes clearer.

Additional information on NRC actions in response to the events in Japan, including the information notice cited above, may be found on the NRC's public Web page given above, http://www.nrc.gov/japan/japan-info.html.

Thank you for your interest in these matters and for your questions.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Eric J. Leeds, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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Sincerely,

Eric J. Leeds, Director
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