

July 18, 2012

The Honorable J. Randy Forbes
Member, United States House of
Representatives
9401 Courthouse Road, #201
Chesterfield, VA 23832

Dear Congressman Forbes:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of June 19, 2012, forwarding correspondence from your constituent, Ronald Figg. Mr. Figg expressed concern that the public was not fully informed regarding the restart of the North Anna Power Station and that safety concerns, particularly seismic issues, remain unaddressed.

The NRC approved restart of the plant on November 11, 2011, based on our technical evaluation of Virginia Electric and Power Company's (also referred to as Dominion) restart readiness plan, as well as our own independent inspections. Extensive NRC reviews and inspections confirmed the licensee's conclusion that no functional damage occurred. The staff's assessment of Dominion's restart plan is documented in the staff's technical evaluation dated November 11, 2011. In addition, the licensee's commitments for long-term, post-restart activities are provided in a Confirmatory Action Letter also dated November 11, 2011. Both of these documents are publicly available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) under accession numbers ML11308B406 and ML11311A201, respectively.

In carrying out our evaluation, the NRC staff conducted an independent, comprehensive review using the criteria of Regulatory Guide 1.167, "Restart of a Nuclear Power Plant Shut Down by a Seismic Event," which endorses the Electric Power Research Institute's (EPRI's) NP-6695, "Guidelines for Nuclear Plant Response to an Earthquake." The EPRI document provides guidance on actions to be taken if the plant exceeds its design basis earthquake, which was the case at North Anna. The staff also considered lessons learned from the 2007 earthquake at the Kashiwazaki Nuclear Power Plant in Japan, and International Atomic Energy Agency Safety Report No. 66, "Earthquake Preparedness and Response for Nuclear Power Plants." This report provided us with lessons learned from a non-U.S. plant that also had exceeded its safe shutdown earthquake.

Beyond the criteria provided in Regulatory Guide 1.167, the NRC also conducted or requested additional analyses. For example, audits were conducted on fuel assemblies to ensure the integrity of the fuel and Dominion performed additional calculations to demonstrate that the integrity of the fuel assembly components weren't compromised. Dominion also conducted additional functional testing of the North Anna Unit 1 snubbers. The function of a snubber during an earthquake is to resist sharp motions of a pipe or component.

Our reviews were informed by the results of NRC inspections (i.e., an onsite review by an Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) and a restart readiness inspection). Inspection reports were issued for both of these inspections and they are publicly available in ADAMS under accession numbers ML113040031 and ML113340345, respectively. After the NRC approval for restart, the inspection process continued with NRC inspectors at the plant during the startup process to

monitor the performance of the plant's systems. This inspection is documented in the publicly available Startup Monitoring Team Inspection Report, which is in ADAMS under accession number ML113540520.

Several public meetings were conducted throughout the review process in order to communicate with the public and other stakeholders regarding the status of the review. At a September 8, 2011, public meeting, the licensee discussed its initial assessment of the earthquake's impact on the North Anna plant and presented its future plans. On October 3, 2011, an AIT public exit meeting was conducted to convey the results of that inspection. On October 21, 2011, the NRC Commission was briefed about the seismic event, analysis, and restart activities by both Dominion and the NRC staff. On November 1, 2011, a public meeting was held in Mineral, VA, to discuss the status of the Restart Readiness Inspection and technical evaluation activities associated with the North Anna seismic event.

Separately, we continue to examine seismic safety issues at all U.S. commercial nuclear power plants as part of our follow up to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami affecting the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. Among the actions taken by the agency to implement the recommendations of our Near-Term Task Force created following the events in Japan, was issuing request-for-information letters. These letters, issued March 12, 2012, directed each nuclear power plant licensee to reevaluate the seismic and flooding hazards at its sites using present-day methods and guidance, and to conduct walkdowns of its facilities to ensure protection against the hazards in their current licensing basis. The NRC expects most licensees will complete the walkdowns by the end of 2012. The NRC expects that the majority of licensees, including those with the units that have greatest potential seismic risks, will be able to complete their seismic reevaluations within a 5-year time frame. Once responses to the letters are received, the staff will assess them and take any additional regulatory actions that may be warranted.

Please be assured that the NRC takes its commitment to provide adequate protection of public health and safety very seriously. We are confident of our decision to allow the restart of the North Anna Power Station, and we will take any additional actions necessary to ensure that we continue to meet that commitment. If you need any additional information, please contact me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA by Michael R. Johnson for/

R. W. Borchardt
Executive Director
for Operations

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