



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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Becky Almeter
4332 Rhodes Ave.
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Hello Becky;

Thank you for your letter to Chairman Macfarlane regarding the use of nuclear power plants in the United States, and I apologize for the delay in getting back to you. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's primary mission is to ensure public health and safety during civilian uses of radioactive materials (such as in nuclear power plants) in the United States. The NRC oversees the operation of 104 U.S. commercial nuclear power plants, the ongoing construction of five new reactors and the process of creating nuclear fuel in the United States.

The Department of Energy is the government agency that deals with the policy question of how the nation should invest in various energy sources. The NRC takes no position on whether nuclear power or any other power source should be used. We simply make sure nuclear power is safe if the decision is made to use it.

A great deal of basic information about nuclear power and the NRC's role in overseeing it is available in our Information Digest, which is on the agency website at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1350/> and I've included a hard copy.

Nuclear power plants, when they meet all the NRC's requirements, can run continuously and generate electricity for up to two years at a time. Nuclear power plants' primary effect on the environment involves water use. Reactors generate steam that runs the plant's turbine-generator, and the plants require large amounts of water to condense that steam back into water before it returns to the reactor. That outside water most often comes from rivers, lakes or the ocean, and the process has two main effects. Drawing the water in can harm fish and other aquatic life, while returning the now-warmer water to the river/lake/ocean can provide a beneficial zone for fish and other creatures to live in. The NRC reviews these sorts of environmental effects when a reactor is proposed or a company asks to extend a reactor's license to operate. Where possible, we require the impacts to be reduced or compensated for.

Please feel free to e-mail me at Scott.Burnell@nrc.gov if you have any other questions. I hope your research project at camp was successful.

Scott Burnell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Burnell', written in a cursive style.

Office of Public Affairs
Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Encl: NRC Information Digest