

April 16, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter dated February 20, 2013, expressing the views you and your colleagues have regarding ongoing agency activities resulting from the Fukushima accident in Japan. Specifically, you addressed the NRC staff's recommendations for boiling water reactors with Mark I and Mark II containments pertaining to containment vent operability during severe accidents and the use of containment filtration.

On March 19, 2013, after careful consideration and deliberation, the Commission approved the enhancement of a March 2012 Order that required reliable hardened venting systems at 31 boiling-water reactors with Mark I and Mark II containments by requiring licensees to replace or upgrade those hardened venting systems with a containment venting system designed and installed to remain functional during severe accident conditions. This was "Option 2" from the staff paper to the Commission dated November 26, 2012. The Commission also directed the staff to produce within one year the technical bases to support rulemaking that would require filtering strategies for Mark I and Mark II containments following a severe accident. As part of producing the technical bases, the Commission directed the staff to consider the use of engineered filters on the vents, as well as a performance-based approach that was endorsed by the Agency's independent Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards. This approach would use existing systems to achieve a similar reduction in radioactive releases during an accident. During this development, the staff will engage a diversity of external stakeholders and present its work to the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards at appropriate points in the process. Staff was further instructed to fully explore the requirements associated with measures to enhance the capability to maintain containment integrity and to cool core debris during severe accidents. The Commission directed the staff to prepare a proposed rule within 2 years and a final rule within 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Allison M. Macfarlane

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Menendez
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510