

April 9, 2013

Michael Yohan, Chair
Swift River School Committee
18 Pleasant Street
Erving, MA 01344

Dear Chairman Yohan:

I am responding to your letter of January 31, 2013, to Chairman Macfarlane in which you requested that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) expand the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) for communities surrounding the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant.

In light of the events at Japan's Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011, the NRC in conjunction with other U.S. Government entities recommended a prudent and conservative travel advisory for U.S. citizens within a 50-mile range around the facility. This recommendation was based on the limited and often conflicting information regarding the status of the six Fukushima reactor units (and their associated spent fuel pools), which caused U.S. decision-makers to postulate a worst case scenario. The 50-mile travel advisory was issued by the U.S. Department of State to inform U.S. citizens in Japan about the possible safety concerns that may affect their travel in and around the Fukushima prefecture.

The NRC received numerous stakeholder recommendations, such as yours, encouraging the NRC staff to re-evaluate the basis for the site of EPZs around nuclear power reactor sites in the U.S. In response to the Fukushima Dai-ichi event, the Commission established a senior-level agency Near-Term Task Force that conducted a methodical and systematic review of NRC processes and regulations to determine whether any enhancements to the existing regulatory structure were warranted. In July 2011, the Near-Term Task Force submitted its findings and recommendations to the Commission in a report entitled "Recommendations for Enhancing Reactor Safety in the 21st Century," which is publicly available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System under Accession No. ML11186A950. The Near-Term Task Force report identified 12 major recommendations with the potential to enhance the safety of U.S. nuclear power reactor facilities. In October 2011, the NRC staff provided its proposed plan of action to address the report's recommendations and a three-tiered prioritization scheme. Although the size and basis of EPZs were not one of the 12 recommendations as part of the review, the NRC staff informed the Commission that the basis for EPZs would be re-evaluated as a long-term study.

Should a radiological event occur at a nuclear power plant in the U.S., a defense-in-depth strategy for protecting the public's health and safety is in place consisting of approved plans, processes, and equipment. These plans and strategies are practiced frequently and assessed at least biennially by the NRC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Additionally, because States have the overall authority for implementing their emergency response plans, they can expand public protective actions beyond 10 miles, if warranted. In a 1979 policy statement (44 FR (*Federal Register*) 61123, October 23, 1979), the NRC endorsed

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NUREG-0396, "Planning Basis for the Development of State and Local Government Radiological Emergency Response Plans in Support of Light Water Nuclear Power Plants," which provides a bases for the EPZ size, including an assumption that the planning conducted for the communities within 10 miles would provide a substantial basis for expansion of the EPZ should it ever be necessary. Therefore, unlike the challenges that occurred during the Fukushima Dai-ichi events, the NRC staff is confident that a State will have the needed information and resources to take the necessary actions to protect their constituents.

In the coming years, there are plans to further study the potential health effects of the radioactivity released from the Fukushima Dai-ichi site. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation has planned a 2-year assessment of Fukushima impacts; and a major initiative (the Fukushima Health Survey) is planned that will inform a more detailed future dose assessment by recreating the whereabouts of every Fukushima prefecture resident from the time of the March 11th nuclear accident onwards. The NRC staff will continue to monitor the results of these efforts and their potential implications regarding the U.S. regulatory approach to emergency planning around nuclear power plants, including the EPZ size.

If you need any additional information, please contact me, or Mr. Joseph Anderson of my staff at (301) 415-4114.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Scott Morris, Acting Director
Division of Preparedness and Response
Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response

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Scott Morris, Acting Director
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