

June 16, 2015

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Lowey:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of May 13, 2015, concerning a transformer fire at the Indian Point Energy Center on May 9, 2015. Specifically, you asked for a thorough investigation of the cause of the fire and the safety risks it posed, an examination of the environmental health impacts, and a list and justification for all safety exemptions the NRC has granted at the Indian Point facility.

At 5:50 p.m. on May 9, 2015, with Unit 3 operating at 100 percent power, one of its two main transformers failed. The cause of the failure has not yet been identified. The failure resulted in an automatic shutdown of the reactor and an oil fire occurred in the vicinity of the main transformer. Plant operators declared an “Unusual Event”—the lowest of four levels of emergency classification for nuclear power plants used by the NRC—at 6:01 p.m. because of the explosion associated with the transformer failure. A fire suppression system for the transformer automatically doused the fire. In addition, the plant’s onsite fire brigade, with assistance from the Montrose and Verplank fire departments, sprayed water and foam onto the transformer to help put out the fire. NRC resident inspectors responded to the site, observed Entergy’s initial response to the fire event, and verified that the reactor was safely shutdown without complications. The Unusual Event was terminated at 9:03 p.m. after the fire was fully extinguished.

Main transformers are covered by the NRC’s fire protection requirements, which establish a “defense-in-depth” approach to prevent, detect, control, and extinguish fires. Specifically, fire protection systems must protect safe shutdown equipment from the impact of large transformer fires. Transformers typically are protected by automatic water spray systems, as is the case at Indian Point.

As part of its ongoing baseline inspection program, NRC Region I inspectors will review Entergy’s evaluation of the cause of the transformer failure and the plant’s response, including performance of the automatic shutdown systems, safety systems, and the activation of the fire brigade. Because there have been multiple transformer fires at Indian Point over the past several years, the inspectors also will evaluate possible common elements among these events, such as transformer monitoring and maintenance practices. These results will be published in future publicly available inspection reports.

Additionally, the NRC initiated a Special Inspection at Indian Point Unit 3 shortly after the transformer failure event to better understand the unexpected presence of water in an electrical equipment room during the event on May 9. This room contains electrical equipment that provides power to plant safety systems. Among other things, the NRC inspectors will be

reviewing whether the efforts to extinguish the transformer fire caused the accumulation of the water observed in the electrical equipment room.

With regard to environmental health impacts of the transformer fire, (i.e., the impacts of an oil and/or chemical release to the river), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is responsible for examining those impacts.

As requested, enclosed with this letter is a listing of all exemptions, including fire protection-related exemptions, granted by the NRC to Indian Point Units 2 and 3. The list is publicly available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System at Accession No. ML12172A370. The list also is on the nrc.gov website, Indian Point page (<http://www.nrc.gov/info-finder/reactor/ip2.html>). While the list was compiled on June 20, 2012, it remains current as no exemptions have been granted since the list was created. The justification for each exemption is contained in the documents (letter or Grant of Exemption) referenced with each listed exemption. The NRC staff has reviewed the Indian Point exemptions listed in the enclosure and has determined that none of those exemptions played a role in the transformer failure of May 9.

I have directed the NRC's Office of Congressional Affairs (OCA) to provide you with a copy of the referenced inspection reports when they become available. If you have any questions, please contact me or Eugene Dacus, Director of OCA, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Stephen G. Burns

Enclosure:
As stated