

January 22, 2016

The Honorable Dan Coats  
United States Senator  
10 West Market Street, Suite 1650  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Senator Coats:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of December 15, 2015, forwarding correspondence from Dr. Mark Kelly. In his correspondence with your staff, Dr. Kelly raised concerns with the use of inaccurate scientific data that could impact nuclear safety. Dr. Kelly's principal concern relates to zirconium components that comprise the fuel rods within the reactor vessel and contain the uranium fuel during operation.

Dr. Kelly first raised this concern to the NRC in 1999, relative to erroneous or distorted data used in X-ray diffraction texture analyses of zirconium alloy tubing. The NRC evaluated his concern and concluded that, while there were shortcomings associated with quality assurance in the case identified, there were no safety concerns that warranted further investigation or regulatory action. The quality assurance shortcomings were addressed by the vendor and assessed by the NRC at that time. The NRC communicated the resolution of this concern to Dr. Kelly, and noted that any decision stemming from erroneous texture analyses could not have resulted in the use of substandard materials in zirconium components.

In support of this concern, Dr. Kelly referenced the manual reactor shutdown at Indian Point Nuclear Generating Unit 2 on December 5, 2015. The recent manual reactor shutdown at Indian Point Nuclear Generating Unit was the result of an electrical problem in the turbine building. The reactor was shut down safely and the licensee is investigating the cause of the electrical problem. This event was not related to Dr. Kelly's original concern regarding the treatment of information pertaining to zirconium components.

The NRC agrees that using accurate information in decision making is important and evaluated Dr. Kelly's concerns thoroughly. The NRC staff's review of Dr. Kelly's correspondence with your office did not identify any new information to support a reevaluation of the NRC's earlier findings. If you need any additional information, please contact me or Eugene Dacus, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Victor M. McCree  
Executive Director  
for Operations

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