



**UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**  
REGION II  
245 PEACHTREE CENTER AVENUE NE, SUITE 1200  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-1257

March 23, 2016

EA-16-061

Mr. Joseph P. Grimes  
Chief Nuclear Officer and  
Executive Vice President  
1101 Market Street  
3R Lookout Place  
Chattanooga, TN 37402-2801

**SUBJECT: CHILLED WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR RAISING AND ADDRESSING SAFETY  
CONCERNS AT THE WATTS BAR NUCLEAR PLANT**

Dear Mr. Grimes:

As discussed during the public meeting held on March 22, 2016 in the RII office (ML16083A403), we initiated a review in late 2015 at the Watts Bar Nuclear Plant into the environment for raising and addressing safety issues. We began this review in light of information received through our inspection and allegations process associated with the Safety Conscious Work Environment (SCWE) within the Operations Department and its influence on the safe operation of the plant. Our review includes information received through allegations, inspections, and interviews of your staff over the past few months. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has concluded that a Chilled Work Environment exists in the Operations Department because of a perception that operators are not free to raise safety concerns using all available avenues without fear of retaliation. We have not identified any serious safety violations or instances involving significant plant safety issues, but the information gathered has led to concerns about the impact the work environment is having on plant operations and raises questions about your commitment to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment. We want to ensure that TVA has a clear understanding of the scope of our concerns and to communicate specific requests and expectations for your response.

The Safety Culture Policy Statement (76 FR 34773; June 14, 2011) sets forth the Commission's expectation that licensees establish and maintain a positive safety culture commensurate with the safety and security significance of their activities and the nature and complexity of their organizations and functions. The NRC defines nuclear safety culture as the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment. A safety conscious work environment is defined by the NRC as an environment in which "employees feel free to raise safety concerns, both to their management and to the NRC, without fear of retaliation" and is one trait of a strong safety culture. NRC Regulatory Issue Summary 05-018, "Guidance for Establishing and Maintaining a Safety Conscious Work Environment," dated August 25, 2005, further describes the NRC's expectations in this area.

We have gathered information in a number of areas which, to varying degrees, calls into question whether management is open to safety concerns raised by operators, whether there is a proper “safety-first” focus during plant operations, and whether your corrective action program and Employee Concerns Program (ECP) have been effective at identifying and resolving these issues. The NRC has determined there is sufficient evidence to support the existence of an environment within the Operations Department where your employees do not feel free to raise safety concerns to your management because they fear retaliation and do not feel that their concerns are being addressed. Our concern is heightened by information that indicates undue influence and direction of licensed operators from sources external to the control room affected operational performance. We are concerned an environment exists where control room operations may be influenced by management in a manner that undermines licensed senior operator responsibility for directing licensed activities.

More broadly, we are concerned that a fear of retaliation exists to the extent that it is impeding open communication within the Operations Department. We have concerns that the current environment is impacting the normal processes designed to identify such issues and effect changes in affected aspects of the site safety culture. Our reviews found that information from the corrective action program, the ECP, and other sources, have provided opportunities for management to identify changes in certain aspects of the safety culture and SCWE, but the information has not been fully acknowledged and acted upon.

The NRC considers it vital for TVA to assess the climate at the Watts Bar station, address the root causes that allowed the chilled work environment to exist, and take steps to ensure the staff at Watts Bar are willing to openly participate in the process. We note that a Confirmatory Order (EA-09-009, EA-09-203) remains in effect to confirm commitments made by TVA for all three nuclear stations to address past SCWE issues. In summary, we request that you conduct your own in-depth assessment, and we acknowledge that surveys and evaluations recently conducted or directed by TVA might form part of such an assessment. We ask that you provide your plan of action for addressing this matter to the NRC within 30 days of the date of this letter. Included in your plan we request you: 1) describe any immediate/short term actions which provide reassurance of acceptable performance during completion of your in-depth assessment; 2) describe how the in-depth assessment will be/was conducted by persons independent of the organization affected; 3) evaluate effectiveness of the implementation of Confirmatory Order (EA-09-009, EA-09-203) requirements relative to the current conditions; 4) detail how you will address the potential extent of condition in organizations outside of Operations; 5) describe any associated corrective actions and how you will measure the effectiveness of any corrective actions; and 6) describe how you will address past effectiveness of your corrective action program and ECP. Additionally, we request you promptly notify the members of the workforce of the issuance of this letter.

Approximately two weeks after we receive your action plan, we would like to meet with you again to discuss this matter in more detail, so that we may plan for appropriate NRC monitoring and follow-up.

In accordance with 10 CFR 2.790 of the NRC's "Rules of Practice," a copy of this letter and your response will be made available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from the NRC's document system (ADAMS), accessible from the NRC Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. To the extent possible, your response should not include any personal privacy, proprietary, or safeguards information so that it can be made available to the Public without redaction. If personal privacy information is necessary to provide an acceptable response, then please provide a bracketed copy of your response that identifies the personal privacy-related information and a redacted copy of your response that deletes the personal privacy-related information. Identify the particular portions of the response in question which, if disclosed, would create an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy, identify the individual whose privacy would be invaded in each instance, describe the nature of the privacy invasion, and indicate why, considering the public interest in the matter, the invasion of privacy is unwarranted. If you request withholding on any other grounds, you must specifically identify the portions of your response that you seek to have withheld and provide in detail the bases for your claim of withholding (e.g., provide the information required by 10 CFR 2.790(b) to support a request for withholding confidential commercial or financial information). If safeguards information is necessary to provide an acceptable response, please provide the level of protection described in 10 CFR 73.21.

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Catherine Haney  
Regional Administrator

Docket Nos.: 50-390, 391  
License Nos.: NPF-90, 96

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ADAMS:  Yes      ACCESSION NUMBER: ML16083A479       SUNSI REVIEW COMPLETE       FORM 665 ATTACHED

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DATE	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016
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DATE	3/23/2016	3/23/2016	3/23/2016				
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