

D870810

The Honorable Lando W. Zech, Jr.
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Chairman Zech:

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY ACRS VIEWS ON FIRE RISK RESEARCH SCOPING STUDY

During the 328th meeting of the ACRS, August 6-8, 1987, we discussed the scope, direction, and current status of the Fire Risk Scoping Study being performed by Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) for the NRC. The ACRS Subcommittee on Auxiliary Systems also discussed this matter at a meeting on July 23, 1987. In our review, we had the benefit of discussions with representatives of the Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research (RES) and SNL.

In the ACRS report of February 19, 1986 to the Congress on the FY 1987 NRC safety research program, and also in its June 11, 1986 report to the Commission on the FY 1988 research program and budget, the Committee expressed concern about terminating the fire protection research program at the end of FY 1986 and recommended that funding for research in this area be restored. The RES response to this concern was the initiation of a scoping study on the risk of fires to determine if further fire-related research is warranted. This study is to utilize results of completed research and the fire risk analysis which is now nearing completion for the LaSalle County Station nuclear plant.

In the ACRS letter of July 16, 1986, the Committee expressed concern about the loss of program information and momentum that would result from premature termination of ongoing fire-related research activities while awaiting the results of the scoping study. The Committee noted that termination of the needed research would be a serious loss, and would be costly to reconstitute later.

Although the Commission agreed with the ACRS on the importance of fire protection research, it did not restore the funding. However, it did direct the Staff to work closely with the Committee to assess further research needs and to consider the priority that should be assigned to fire protection research. A good relationship was established and efforts are proceeding on schedule to assign a priority to possible research needs.

Various tasks are now progressing and the work is scheduled for completion in December 1987. The study includes identification of various potential fire-related issues, including those cited by the ACRS, and an assessment of the risk significance of such issues. The risk considerations include an assessment of uncertainties in various previous probabilistic risk assessments (PRAs) and a requantification of PRA fire scenarios. The final task will deal with the completeness of 10 CFR Part 50, Appendix R and other fire-associated regulatory requirements as they may relate to potential fire issues. Although the scoping study is

still under way, we believe that the Commission may wish to be informed of our preliminary views which follow.

The main objective of the Fire Risk Scoping Study is to assess the risk significance and dominant sources of uncertainty associated with fire risk issues, with a final goal of assigning an appropriate priority for possible fire-related research. We believe that the study is progressing satisfactorily toward this goal and is targeting the various concerns expressed by the Committee. The scope appears to be providing a needed and timely basis for determining priorities. We plan to review and issue comments on the final results of the scoping study. The recommended priority and the technical aspects of any proposed fire research program, including interim or long-range budgetary needs, will be discussed at that time.

Sincerely,

William Kerr
Chairman

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