

50-237



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

February 6, 1997

Mr. David Stowell  
740 S. Federal #504  
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Dear Mr. Stowell:

I am responding to your letter to Chairman Jackson dated January 2, 1997. I am the Project Director in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation with the regulatory oversight responsibility for the Commonwealth Edison Company (ComEd) nuclear plants. I appreciate your interest in the NRC's activities in relation to these plants and can assure you that the NRC is taking actions to thoroughly inspect these sites and take enforcement action where appropriate.

As you may be aware, performance of the ComEd plants has been a concern to the NRC for some time and the plants that you mentioned in your letter - Dresden, LaSalle, and Zion - have received significant NRC attention. These three plants are on the NRC's "watch list" of plants that warrant increased NRC attention from both headquarters and the regional office (LaSalle and Zion were placed on the list in January 1997 and Dresden has been on the list since January 1992). The increased attention will consist of inspections, monitoring of licensee actions, and site visits by NRC management. They will remain on the list until they have demonstrated consistent improved performance.

In addition, as a result of continuing inconsistent performance of the ComEd sites, the NRC issued a letter on January 27, 1997, requiring ComEd to provide information regarding its ability to safely operate its six nuclear stations while sustaining performance improvement at each site. If the NRC determines that the information provided does not assure that ComEd can operate all six stations safely, it could take actions including the modification, suspension, or revocation of the operating license for one or more plants. This is a significant action that indicates the concern that the NRC has in ensuring that these plants are operated safely. For your information, I am enclosing a copy of that letter, as well as the letter informing ComEd of the results of the January 1997 Senior Management Meeting.

By way of background, the NRC inspection program is designed to ensure that licensees identify and resolve safety issues before they affect safe operations. The NRC inspection program is audit-oriented to verify, through scrutiny of carefully selected samples, that relevant activities are being properly conducted and equipment is properly maintained to ensure safe operations. The inspection process monitors the licensee's activity, provides inspection findings to the licensee's management and enforcement action if appropriate, and conducts followup inspections to ensure that the licensee has implemented lasting corrective action. On-site resident inspectors are assigned to each nuclear plant on a full-time basis. The activities of the resident inspectors are supplemented by engineers and specialists from the regional office and headquarters staff who perform inspections in a wide

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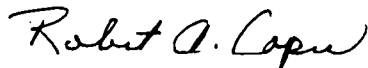
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variety of engineering and scientific disciplines. These additional inspections are conducted based on performance trends or in response to plant events.

In addition to routine inspections, the following are some of the additional inspections performed at ComEd sites in response to concerns with specific aspects of the licensee's performance: an Independent Safety Inspection at Dresden in the fall of 1996; an Augmented Inspection Team at LaSalle in July 1996, following an event involving fouling of the service water tunnel; a System Operational Performance Inspection of the Service Water System at LaSalle in September 1996; and an Engineering and Technical Support Inspection at Zion in August 1996. These inspections provided significant insights into licensee performance and resulted in numerous corrective actions taken by the licensee. In addition, the NRC has issued, or is pursuing, enforcement action for several violations identified in these inspections.

Based on the increased attention on the ComEd sites, especially Dresden, LaSalle, and Zion, I am confident that these facilities will continue to receive sufficient NRC inspection and oversight. As a result, the NRC will be informed of any safety problems and will take necessary actions, including enforcement, when appropriate. I thank you for your letter and hope that this response addresses your concerns.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Capra, Director  
Project Directorate III-2  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosures:

Letters from H. Thompson (NRC) to  
J. O'Conner (ComEd) dated  
January 27, 1997

D. Stowell

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