

# GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

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Mr. Thomas M. Novak  
Assistant Director for Licensing  
Division of Licensing  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Novak:

I was informed by Lee Dewey of the Office of Executive Legal Director that I would not be informed orally of any developments in the Arizona Public Service ("APS") or Nuclear Regulatory Commission ("NRC") inquiries into the failure of the primary reactor coolant system during hot functional testing at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station. I was told that the only manner in which I would be informed of the progress or lack of progress in these inquiries was to transmit all questions in writing, apparently to you as Assistant Director for Licensing.

Therefore I am asking the following questions:

1. E.E. Van Brunt, Vice-President of APS, apparently informed the NRC that during testing the widening of the gap between the diffuser and impeller led to a reduction in vibration in the pumps. Although I fail to see how this information is new since it is apparent from the design of the pumps that widening the gap will lead to a lessening of vibration and flow rate, I have the following questions:

- (a) How much has the gap been widened?
- (b) How much has the vibration been reduced?
- (c) What is the reduction in the efficiency of the pumps?
- (d) What effect will this reduction in efficiency of the pumps have on the potential generating capacity of the three reactors?
- (e) What additional testing has APS, Combustion Engineering, ("CE") or any APS contractor or vendor completed to verify that flow-induced vibration was indeed the cause for the failure of the pumps during hot-functional testing?

2. What if any testing has APS, CE or any APS' vendor or contractor done to determine the cause for the other failures

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encountered during hot functional testing including movement of the control rod shroud assembly, cracking of the control rod tubes, and dislodging of the thermosleeve.

3. What is the current time estimate for the delay which will be encountered in the fuel load dates for the three Palo Verde reactors due to testing and evaluation of the failures encountered during testing and/or redesign of the primary reactor coolant system and pumps.

Please provide the APS and NRC justification for this estimate of the delay and identify any documents or technical analyses which support these estimates.

When will a public meeting and/or briefing be scheduled to discuss the progress of the APS, CE and APS vendor inquiries into the pump and other system failures?

5. What if any review is the NRC conducting of the APS' inquiry? What if any independent review or evaluation of the pump and other failures encountered during hot functional testing is the NRC conducting?

6. Were these problems detected by APS' loose parts detection system during the period of hot functional testing? I have been preliminarily informed by Region V that apparently the system, which was in operation during the tests, did not detect that loose parts had traveled into the reactor vessel and the steam generators.

I would appreciate your response within a week.

I would like to repeat that I do not believe that this is an adequate system to keep the public informed of the progress of the APS' and NRC investigation into the serious failures of the primary reactor coolant system during the hot functional tests at Palo Verde. In addition, I believe that the NRC's reluctance, and certainly APS' past failures, to keep the public informed demonstrates the need for the Commission to reopen licensing hearings on Unit 1 to ensure an adequate examination is made of the problems encountered during hot functional testing and the corrective action proposed by APS.

Sincerely yours,

  
Lynne Bernabei  
Staff Counsel

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