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Mrs. Kenneth Foster
R.D. 4, Box 383
Newton, New Jersey 07860

Dear Mrs. Foster:

This is in reply to your letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission postmarked August 16, 1979.

You refer to a plan to reopen the facility at Three Mile Island. There are two nuclear power units there. Unit 1 will remain shut down until the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has determined, after a public hearing, that it can be operated without endangering the public health and safety. Unit 2, the one involved in the accident, is not operable and won't be for a long time to come.

You mention that nuclear power plants are going up in South Jersey. Under construction are Units 1 and 2 of the Hope Creek nuclear station on Artificial Island in the Delaware River estuary about 7.5 miles southwest of Salem, New Jersey. Unit 1 is scheduled for operation in 1985 and Unit 2 in 1987. Also on Artificial Island is the Salem nuclear station, where Unit 1 has an operating license and Unit 2 is awaiting an operating license. In addition, there is a construction permit for Unit 1 of the Forked River nuclear Station on a site shared with the unit of the Oyster Creek nuclear station, about 9 miles south of Toms River, New Jersey, and about 3 miles west of Barnegat Bay.

You spoke of deaths, disease, and genetic effects resulting from a serious nuclear accident. The Report of the President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island stated: "On the basis of present scientific knowledge, the radiation doses received by the general population as a result of exposure to the radioactivity released during the accident were so small that there will be no detectable additional cases of cancer, developmental abnormalities or genetic ill-health as a consequence of the accident at TMI." That report went on to say: "The major health effect of the accident appears to have been on the mental health of the people living in the region of Three Mile Island and of the workers at TMI. There was immediate, short-lived mental distress produced by the accident among certain groups of the general population living within 20 miles of TMI."

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An accident involving the meltdown of the fuel in a nuclear power reactor could release large quantities of radioactivity to the atmosphere. The probability of a meltdown is very small; it did not occur at Three Mile Island. Studies have indicated that, if emergency actions such as sheltering or evacuation were taken within about 10 miles of a nuclear power plant, there would be significant savings of early injuries and deaths from the most severe atmospheric releases. In the case of such a release, radioactivity deposited on the ground could enter the food chain and be ingested; the downwind range within which significant contamination could occur would generally be limited to about 50 miles from the power plant. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has endorsed the use of Emergency Planning Zones having a radius around a nuclear power plant of about 10 miles for airborne exposure and about 50 miles for contaminated food.

We assure you that every effort is being made to protect the public health and safety at all nuclear power plants that are currently in operation or that may operate in the future.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by
H. R. Denton

Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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