



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
REGION I
475 ALLENDALE ROAD
KING OF PRUSSIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19406-1415

December 24, 1997

Kyran Connor
County Counsel
Cape May County
Office of County Counsel
4 Moore Road
Cape May Court House, New Jersey 08210-1601

Dear Mr. Connor:

In your letter to me dated December 5, 1997, you forwarded questions on behalf of the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Cape May regarding the restart of Unit 1 at the Salem Nuclear Generating Station. This letter responds to those questions and addresses your request for NRC to hold a meeting in Cape May County to discuss the status of safety issues at the plant.

As you may know, the NRC has significantly increased its inspection efforts at the Salem facility over the past few years and throughout the extended shutdown period. This heightened inspection process is governed by established NRC guidelines (Manual Chapter 0350) for the evaluation of restart readiness at facilities, such as Salem, that have experienced significant problems. The NRC is continuing its systematic review of plant equipment and personnel performance issues through the coordinated efforts of specialist inspectors and the full-time on-site resident inspection staff. Once the licensee has communicated its readiness to restart, the NRC will conduct an additional special inspection (restart assessment team inspection - RATI) to verify that issues that could potentially impact on safe startup have been resolved.

The RATI will be composed of a new group of inspectors who will independently review progress on restart items. Representatives from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection will be invited to observe the RATI. This process parallels the NRC's inspection activity performed this past summer in overseeing the safe restart of Unit 2. Although the licensee has not established a specific date for restart, they have indicated to NRC that restart will likely occur in the first quarter of 1998. For resource scheduling purposes, the NRC is preparing RATI resources for inspection in late January, or anytime thereafter. Upon conclusion of the RATI, NRC will determine if the plant is ready to restart. Authorization to restart will not occur until NRC is satisfied with the licensee's progress.

To provide a more in-depth discussion of the licensee's and NRC's activities to date, I have enclosed the latest version of the NRC's Restart Action Plan and a transcript from the NRC Commission briefing held on June 25, 1997. These documents provide a summary and status report on the primary issues NRC has been following at the station.

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Regarding your request to tour the Salem facility, PSE&G controls access to the plant and tours of the facility should be arranged directly with the licensee. Please contact Ms. Patricia DuBois in PSE&G's nuclear information department to make these arrangements. Ms. DuBois may be reached at (609) 339-1186.

Finally, NRC will hold a meeting open to public observation to discuss its findings with the licensee at the conclusion of the RATI. We would be pleased to have members of the Board, its staff and concerned citizens from your area in attendance at that meeting. NRC schedules its public meetings in central locations to maximize the convenience of all parties who desire to attend. Typically, such meetings are held at or near the vicinity of the plant. Although we appreciate the invitation to meet in Cape May County, holding such meetings closer to Salem Station best serves the overall public interest. I hope that you, and other interested parties from your area, can attend. We will keep you informed of our meeting plans as they are developed.

Our State Liaison Officer, Dr. Robert Bores, would be pleased to discuss any issues of concern to the Board and can be reached at (610) 337-5213.

Sincerely,


Hubert J. Miller
Regional Administrator

Enclosures:
As Stated

cc w/o encls:
State of New Jersey