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UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

December 18, 1998

The Honorable Frank A. LoBiondo  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515-3002

Dear Congressman LoBiondo:

I am responding to your letter dated November 2, 1998, concerning fire protection material used at the Salem Nuclear Generating Station, which is operated by the Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G).

In 1993, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) identified deficiencies in the electrical raceway fire barrier system at Salem at which time compensatory measures were put in place for these deficiencies. Fire protection issues, including these specific deficiencies, were included in the NRC's Restart Assessment Plan for both Salem Units 1 and 2. In April 1997, the NRC conducted a fire protection inspection at Salem to address fire protection issues captured in the Restart Assessment Plan. During this inspection, the NRC identified that PSE&G failed to maintain proper compensatory actions for the 1993 deficiencies, a finding which resulted in enforcement action. In response, PSE&G restored the compensatory measures, which are currently in place, and committed to a long-term corrective action plan. The completion of the NRC's Restart Assessment Plan was a factor in the NRC's decision to modify the June 9, 1995, confirmatory action letter, to allow restart of Unit 2 in August 1997, and Unit 1 in April 1998.

As the NRC staff indicated when you toured the Salem facility in May 1997, PSE&G has established fire watches to compensate for the inoperable fire barriers and has established controls for both combustible material in the affected areas and for ignition sources which could start a fire. Also, other features are provided that protect against fires including automatic fire detection and sprinkler systems in some areas, an onsite trained fire brigade, and a permanent fire station within the plant protected area.

PSE&G's long-term corrective action plan included additional testing and evaluation of installed fire barrier materials and configurations. As a result of this effort, on September 18, 1998, PSE&G notified the NRC that the installed configuration of some of the fire barrier material does not match the as-tested configuration used during qualification of the fire barrier material. PSE&G has indicated that it has adequate compensatory measures and is currently evaluating the installed configurations. Most of these compensatory measures had already been established in response to other related fire barrier issues. The NRC believes that reasonable assurance of adequate protection of public health and safety exists based upon PSE&G's current set of compensatory actions, as well as other plant design features and administrative controls which protect against plant fires. This ensures that the surrounding communities are not affected.

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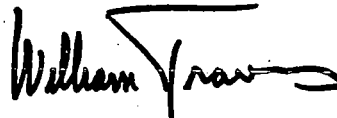
The NRC continues to closely monitor the licensee's compensatory measures and long term corrective actions. One of the major elements of these corrective actions is the Salem Raceway Fire Barrier Wrap Project which consists of three phases. Phase I involves the reanalysis of the safe shutdown strategy; Phase II involves the development of any necessary design modifications; and, Phase III involves the implementation of necessary changes. In a meeting with the NRC staff on September 23, 1998, PSE&G stated that Phase I was on schedule for completion in 1999, as previously committed. PSE&G had also committed to the NRC that Phases II and III will be completed during refueling outages currently scheduled for May and December 2002 for Units 2 and 1, respectively. The NRC has found these schedules to be acceptable.

With respect to your concern regarding the suspension of the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) program, the public dissemination of fire safety issues will not be affected by the NRC's decision to suspend the SALP program. In September 1998, the SALP program was suspended until the NRC staff completes a review of its licensee performance assessment process. In the interim, the NRC will utilize the results of periodic plant performance reviews to disseminate public information on licensee performance. These reviews are intended to identify plant performance trends and issues. As a result, licensee performance will be assessed in much the same way as in the SALP program. Additionally, the NRC continues to disseminate the results of all NRC inspections. Meetings with the licensee are publicized and open for public observation.

I assure you that the NRC has taken the fire barrier issues at Salem seriously and will ensure that PSE&G meets its commitments for returning its fire barriers to full compliance. Regarding your inquiry, the Commission has not issued any recent regulations or taken other actions that could affect the manner in which this issue is addressed. The NRC is working on a rulemaking in the areas of fire protection seals, but the changes being considered would not have any impact on the manner in which the issue you raised is being resolved.

I trust this information is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William D. Travers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William D. Travers  
Executive Director for  
Operations

With respect to your concern regarding the suspension of the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) program, the public dissemination of fire safety issues will not be affected by the NRC's decision to suspend the SALP program. In September 1998, the SALP program was suspended until the NRC staff completes a review of its licensee performance assessment process. In the interim, the NRC will utilize the results of periodic plant performance reviews to disseminate public information on licensee performance. These reviews are intended to identify plant performance trends and issues. As a result, licensee performance will be assessed in much the same way as in the SALP program. Additionally, the NRC continues to disseminate the results of all NRC inspections. Meetings with the licensee are publicized and open for public observation.

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Sincerely,

Original signed by  
William D. Travers

[Redacted signature]

William D. Travers

"This correspondence addresses policy issues previously resolved by the Commission, transmits factual information, or restates Commission policy."

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Letter to Congressman Frank LoBiondo dated December 18, 1998

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The NRC continues to closely monitor the licensee's compensatory measures and long term corrective actions. One of the major elements of these corrective actions is the Salem Raceway Fire Barrier Wrap Project which consists of three phases. Phase I involves the reanalysis of the safe shutdown strategy; Phase II involves the development of design modifications; and, Phase III involves the implementation of necessary changes. In a meeting with the NRC staff on September 23, 1998, PSE&G stated that Phase I was on schedule for completion in 1999, as previously committed. PSE&G had also committed to the NRC that Phases II & III will be completed during refueling outages currently scheduled for May and December 2002 for Units 2 and 1, respectively.

I assure you that the NRC has taken the fire barrier issues at Salem seriously and will ensure that PSE&G meets its commitments for returning its fire barriers to full compliance. Regarding your inquiry, the Commission has not issued any recent regulations or taken other actions that could affect the manner in which this issue is addressed.

I trust that this information is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,

Shirley Ann Jackson

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commitments for returning its fire barrier wraps to full compliance. To reply to your inquiry, the NRC has not issued any recent regulation or taken any actions that could affect the manner in which this issue is addressed.

In September 1998, the NRC suspended its SALP program for an interim period until the NRC staff completes a review of its nuclear power plant performance assessment process. At the end of the process, the Commission will decide whether to resume the SALP program or substitute some program regarded as more effective. During the interim period that the SALP program is suspended, the NRC will utilize the results of its plant performance reviews to provide nuclear power plant performance information to licensees, State and local officials, and the public. These reviews are intended to identify performance trends and other issues since the previous assessment and to make any appropriate changes to the NRC's inspection plans. Since beginning the Plant Performance Review process in 1988, the NRC has continuously improved the process to the point that these reviews now use similar information and address many of the same objectives as the SALP program. As a result, licensee performance will be assessed in much the same way as in the SALP process. Therefore, the public dissemination of fire safety issues will not be affected by the SALP decision. In particular, the NRC staff has received (and will continue to receive) periodic briefings from PSE&G regarding its Fire Barrier Wrap Project. These briefings are open to public observation, and the meeting summaries are placed into the public record.

I trust that this information is responsive to your concerns.

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inquiry about whether the NRC has issued any recent regulation or taken actions taken that could affect the manner in which this issue is addressed, the NRC staff has not done so.

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