

Commonwealth of Virginia



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March 20, 1979

Mr. Joseph M. Hendrie, Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
1717 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia expect the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to assure the safe operation of nuclear power stations such as the Surry Nuclear Power Station.

However, the shutdown of the Surry station, which was ordered on March 9, 1979, may itself have consequences adverse to the public health and safety. In view of these considerations, we request that you proceed to resolve this matter as expeditiously as possible in the circumstances.

The oil supplies of the nation are now affected by a number of adverse conditions in foreign countries. With the cost of oil rising rapidly, the necessity to generate electricity with oil-fired power plants to replace Surry will have a severe economic impact on the citizens of the Commonwealth, assuming the capacity can be replaced at all. It has been estimated that the shutdown could result in \$12 million per month in additional fuel costs.

The question is whether the Surry plant is safe given its condition and the probability that an earthquake which could damage it might occur. As we understand it, an error made in a computer model is the cause of the problem. It is the responsibility of VEPCO and its contractors to bear the financial consequences of such mistakes, not VEPCO's customers.

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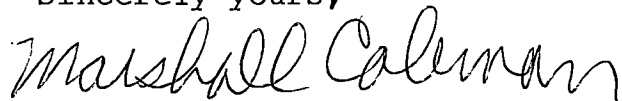
However, VEPCO's customers may still be adversely affected by your action if the Surry shutdown reduces available electric generating capacity to the extent that power curtailments are necessary. Such curtailments can, of course, have dire consequences for the public health and safety.

Although the Surry station was shut down because it used the same computer model as the Beaver Valley Nuclear Power Plant, the design and location characteristics of the Surry Plant are sufficiently different to justify a separate and expeditious review of Surry. Surry is constructed on a soil foundation, while Beaver Valley is on bedrock; therefore any tremors at Surry would be "cushioned" more than at Beaver Valley. Also, much of the piping system at Surry already meets current NRC guidelines on the basis of up-to-date computer reanalysis.

Apparently, there are varying views about the likelihood of an earthquake. The company has represented that the likelihood of an earthquake which could affect the Surry site would be on the order of once during a 12,000 period. Others disagree, but it is known that no earthquake has ever been recorded within a 25-mile radius of the Surry plants.

If the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is concerned about this problem, however, I suggest that it explore the feasibility of monitoring nuclear plant sites for advance warnings of earthquakes. Development of such a monitoring program could possibly make precautionary shutdowns such as this unnecessary.

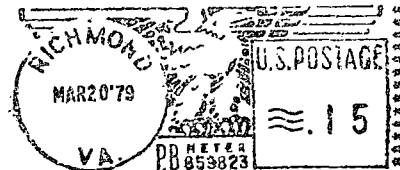
Sincerely yours,



Marshall Coleman
Attorney General



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