



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

NRC FOR
50-416

JUL 12 1979

The Honorable David R. Bowen
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congressman Bowen:

This is in reply to your letter of June 6, 1979 concerning delays in issuance of operating licenses for the Grand Gulf and Waterford nuclear power plants.

The accident at Three Mile Island Unit 2 on March 28 is diverting significant managerial and technical resources of the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation from its previous work. It is clear that certain activities related to that accident require higher priority.

As a result of the realignment of resources and priorities, the expected accomplishments on casework related to the issuance of construction permits (CPs) and operating licenses (OLs) will be severely limited. Within the casework category, priority of reviews will be: (1) near-term OLs, (2) completion of CPs in the hearing stage, (3) other OLs where completion of construction is anticipated by January 1981, and (4) CPs and OLs having special review considerations (i.e., Baily and Midland).

The date estimated by the NRC staff for completion of construction of Grand Gulf Unit 1 is March 1981 as distinguished from the applicant's date of October 1980. (The date for Grand Gulf Unit 2 is several years later.) The corresponding dates for Waterford Unit 3 are September 1981 as estimated by the NRC staff and May 1981 as estimated by the applicant. Since these cases do not qualify under any of the above four priorities at the present time, OL reviews are to be suspended until January 1980. However, we plan to revisit the Grand Gulf site in August of this year to determine whether the construction progress on Unit 1 justifies a correction to our present estimate of completion. If, for example, the utility's estimate of construction completion by October 1980 appeared reasonable, we would assign a higher priority to the Grand Gulf OL review.

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Meanwhile, both the Congress and the Commission are pursuing ways to provide additional resources to the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation so that these and other suspended reviews will be restarted as promptly as possible. The Commission has approved the use of some personnel from other Offices of the NRC in the licensing process for nuclear power plants. Also, the Office of Management and Budget in the Executive Office of the President has written to the Secretaries of the Department of Energy, Department of the Army, and the Department of Interior expressing the hope that they will do all they can to assist NRC in locating technical experts from within the resources of their agencies for use by the NRC on a temporary basis. In particular, personnel from the National Laboratories of the Department of Energy, and from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Geological Survey could be useful.

We are mindful of the economic hardships that can occur as a result of delays in the operation of electric power plants and are working as hard as we can to avoid any unnecessary delays while giving priority to our responsibilities to ensure the continued protection of the health and safety of the public at all nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Lee V. Gossick
Lee V. Gossick
Executive Director
for Operations