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

AUG 30 1979

The Honorable James M. Jeffords
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Jeffords:

In his interim reply to your letter of April 11, 1979, Carlton Kammerer, Director of NRC's Office of Congressional Affairs, indicated that further information regarding the accident at Three Mile Island would be sent to you when it became available.

The Commission's Office of Inspection and Enforcement recently issued an investigative report on the accident entitled "Investigation Into The March 28, 1979 Three Mile Island Accident By Office of Inspection And Enforcement," NUREG-0600 (copy enclosed). This report gives a detailed account of the sequence of events that led to the accident and those that transpired after it was initiated. Your attention is invited to pages 1 through 21 of that report, where a concise summary of events during the early portion of the accident is given.

With respect to your specific question concerning the definition of the term "transient," it is, as Mr. Kammerer explained, a deviation from normal operating conditions. In the context of the Three Mile Island accident, the initiating event was loss of feedwater flow to the steam generators, followed by transient changes in pressure, temperature and flow in the reactor coolant system. These changes are explained in detail in "Staff Report on the Generic Assessment of Feedwater Transients in B&W PWRs," NUREG-0560. This report (copy enclosed) presents an initial staff assessment of reactors similar in design to Three Mile Island.

At the March 29, 1979 briefing of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs you noted that the NRC spokesman stated that substantial core damage had occurred and asked what evidence the spokesman had based the statement on. Certainly, at the time of the March 29 briefing, less was known about the degree of core damage than is the case today. However, there was considerable evidence available to NRC to show that the core was damaged. Specifically, during the afternoon of March 28, NRC suspected that core temperatures were elevated due to indication of superheated steam flow from the core for a

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The Honorable James M. Jeffords 2

substantial period of time. This fact, coupled with the observation that containment radiation levels were very high and that radiation levels in the auxiliary building were also high, led to the conclusion that a substantial number of fuel rods were damaged.

If we can be of further assistance, please advise.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY R. G. SMITH

Lee V. Gossick
Executive Director for Operations

Enclosures:

1. NUREG-0600
2. NUREG-0560

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JAMES M. JEFFORDS
VERMONT CONGRESSMAN

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 11, 1979

PLEASE REPLY TO:

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Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Congressional Affairs
1717 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20557

Dear Sirs:

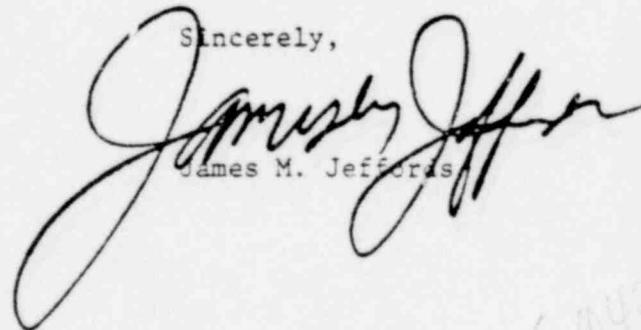
In the aftermath of the recent nuclear plant accident in Pennsylvania, I have been called upon by many of my constituents to provide information on what actually occurred at the Three Mile Island facility.

I would appreciate your office supplying me with whatever material is available which explains in lay terms what happened at the facility. Additionally, a particular request has come to me regarding the events that transpired at a recent briefing (March 29) that was held by the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on this matter. During that briefing, an NRC spokesman stated (I am paraphrasing) that regarding the Three Mile Island accident, "this to my knowledge, is the first instance we have had of substantial core damage associated with a transient."

I would appreciate your office explaining certain elements of this statement. Specifically, how is "transient" defined? What evidence did the NRC spokesman base this statement on? What subsequent statements did the NRC spokesman make further elaborating this point?

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. When responding to my office, please direct your correspondence to Rey Post of my staff.

Sincerely,


James M. Jeffords

JMJ:rp



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

April 18, 1979

The Honorable James M. Jeffords
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congressman Jeffords:

Thank you for your letter of April 11, 1979 regarding the accident at Three Mile Island.

At present the Commission and NRC staff are still occupied with the many activities required to assure that the Three Mile Island Unit 2 is brought to a safe shutdown. Because of this, we are unable to answer all of your specific requests at this time. We will provide a complete response to your inquiry as soon as we are able.

In the meantime, I am enclosing for your information a copy of the testimony given by Mr. Darrell G. Eisenhut before the Senate Subcommittee on Nuclear Regulation in which he gives a "preliminary summary of the significant events that occurred at Three Mile Island" Unit 2.

We will respond to your questions regarding statements made at the March 29, 1979 briefing before the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment as soon as we are able to review the transcript of that meeting. However, the definition of a "transient" is that it is a deviation from normal operating conditions.

I hope these partial responses will be helpful to you until further information is available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carlton Kammerer".

Carlton Kammerer, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

Enclosure:
As stated

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