

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

OVERSIGHT HEARINGS ON THREE MILE ISLAND

OPENING STATEMENT
BY

HON. MORRIS K. UDALL, CHAIRMAN

Thursday, May 24, 1979

The Subcommittee will be in session.

This marks the second day of our hearings on the Three Mile Island accident. On Monday we heard the Subcommittee Task Force report and from Task Force members who presented their collective and individual views on this matter. The Task Force observations emphasized design defects as opposed to operator error as having been the most significant contributor to the events that ended with major damage to the reactor core.

One of the things that had bothered me about the situation that existed over the years was the reluctance of industry and NRC to accept and respond to technical criticism suggesting the existence of design defects requiring correction.

I was particularly concerned about an analysis prepared by Mr. Carl Michelson, a nuclear engineer at TVA, that was sent to both Babcock & Wilcox and the NRC. Few if any steps were taken to alert the operators of B&W reactors of the existence of the problems stressed by Michelson. It seems that it took B&W some 8 months to respond to Mr. Michelson's analysis, and Mr. Michelson believes that the response did not address certain of his major concerns.

We were curious as to how the NRC had responded and Mr. Weaver raised the question on Monday as to whether NRC staff had received the paper and whether the staff had considered it significant.

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Yesterday we received from the NRC a memorandum that shows that by early 1978 that the NRC had received Mr. Michelson's paper, and had accepted one of his principle theses, namely that the pressurizer water level was not a reliable indication of the reactor pressure vessel being full. What is disturbing about the NRC staff memorandum is that while the staff is recommending possible redesign for plants for which no construction permits have been issued, the staff recommended only modified operating instructions for plants where operating licenses are pending, and it recommends nothing at all for operating plants.

I would like to know what action has been taken in response to Michelson's January 1978 memorandum since it is clear that if its warnings had been heeded it is likely that the TMI incident would have been a run of the mill event.

Today we will hear from General Public Utilities, Babcock & Wilcox, the Edison Electric Institute and Atomic Industrial Forum. I would hope that the witnesses would summarize their statements in order that the members might have ample opportunity to ask questions. Of particular concern is how we got to Three Mile Island and how we are going to insure that it does not happen again.

We will proceed with Mr. Dieckamp who is President of General Public Utilities. He is accompanied by John Herbein, Vice President of Metropolitan Edison, and Mr. Gary Miller, Superintendent of the TMI plant.