



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

NRC PDR
NRC JUN

Docket No. STN 50-482

JUN 14 1979

Ms. Wanda Christy
515 North 1st Street
Burlington, Kansas 66839

Dear Ms. Christy:

Thank you for your letter of May 18, 1979, in which you state that you attended the public meeting held in Burlington, Kansas on May 15, 1979 regarding the issue of the concrete strength of the Wolf Creek base mat. In your letter, you also make various comments concerning several matters. I would like to take this opportunity to respond to some of your comments.

You indicate that at the meeting it appeared that the utility showed a lack of respect for NRC members and that the utility was telling us that it was right (in its conclusions regarding the acceptability of the base mat). The meeting in Burlington, Kansas was held for the express purpose of providing for the exchange of technical information between the applicant and the NRC staff. In such meetings, it is the prerogative of the applicant to present what it believes to be its interpretation of the technical facts (in this case, the acceptability of the base mat). In our review of the matter, we will evaluate the facts and data presented and arrive at our own independent conclusions, irrespective of how strongly an applicant may present its views.

You state that you and other persons living near the plant hear reports of shoddy workmanship and materials and that workers have quit because of it. We are not aware of the reports you discuss in your letter. For your information, the NRC's Region IV Office of Inspection and Enforcement in Arlington, Texas has included its telephone number (Area Code 817 334-2841) in the Burlington, Kansas phone directory. This number can be used by workers, or any member of the public, to make a collect call if they want to report any potential or suspected deficiencies in the construction of the Wolf Creek plant with full assurance that their identity will be protected from disclosure. Any information that would be received by Region IV from such calls would certainly be investigated.

With regard to the workmanship at the Wolf Creek facility, we require, and the applicant has implemented, an approved quality assurance program on construction activities. A primary purpose of this program is to permit the applicant to detect, by inspection, any construction work that does not meet requirements so that such deficiencies can be corrected. In addition to the applicant's inspection program, the NRC's Office of Inspection and Enforcement also performs periodic inspections, most of which are unannounced, to assure that the applicant, among other things, is acceptably implementing its quality

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assurance program requirements. Additionally, the NRC will require the applicant to conduct an extensive preoperational test program for each system and component prior to plant operation.

With regard to the Three Mile Island incident, the NRC staff is currently conducting a thorough investigation of the incident. This investigation includes the study of potential design deficiencies in the plant, plant operator response to the accident including operator errors and/or misinterpretation of plant instrumentation, and all other aspects of the accident which might lead to information that would improve the safety of nuclear power plants. Although the major emphasis of the current staff effort is focused on nuclear power plants that are presently licensed to operate, the results of the staff's investigations will also be applied to plants that are currently under construction and to plants for which construction permits have been applied for but not yet issued. The Wolf Creek plant will utilize a Westinghouse reactor while the Three Mile Island plant utilizes a Babcock and Wilcox reactor. Therefore, some of the results of the staff's investigation may not be directly applicable to the Wolf Creek plant. It is the intent of the NRC staff to assure that the Wolf Creek plant design and method of operation afford a minimum of risk to the public health and safety.

You refer to reports of workers "playing games" to see how fast they could mix and pour concrete. The NRC's Office of Inspection and Enforcement has performed an investigation of the matter of concrete strength for the Wolf Creek base mat. In this investigation, various aspects of the matter were looked into, including an investigation of how the concrete was mixed. A report of this investigation was issued on February 16, 1979. In the report, a statement was made that the NRC inspector was told that a "race" existed between the batch plant and placement crew to prevent or to cause a call for more concrete. The report also stated that the inspector could not attach any direct significance to this competitive spirit.

You state that some of you who have had concerns and questioned the utility personnel have had your jobs threatened and received other types of harassment. We have no knowledge to indicate that this is occurring and, therefore, I am not able to comment on it. As I indicated above, anyone who has questions or complaints concerning deficiencies in the Wolf Creek plant may contact the NRC by making a collect call.

You state that the record indicates that the NRC has supported the nuclear industry. I would like to clarify the role of the NRC. The role of the NRC in its review of nuclear power plants is to consider those measures necessary for the protection of the public's health and safety and the environment. To carry out its responsibilities, the NRC staff conducts detailed reviews for each nuclear power plant prior to construction authorization and again prior to the start of operation. When the situation warrants, such as is the case regarding the Wolf Creek base mat issue, a detailed review is conducted of a specific issue if it develops during construction but prior to an application

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for an operating license. In our review of the Wolf Creek base mat matter, the public's health and safety has been and will continue to be the prime consideration. Also, I would like to note that in accordance with NRC regulations, a nuclear power plant design is not approved until an operating license is issued.

You state that the Chairman of the Kansas Corporation Commission, has been quoted as saying that the utilities could stop work now on Wolf Creek and start all over building a coal plant and it would cost less than finishing Wolf Creek. We have no knowledge of such a statement. With regard to the relative costs between a nuclear plant and a coal plant at Wolf Creek, this is a matter that was evaluated during the construction permit stage of review for Wolf Creek. At that time, the staff determined that when the total costs, including the operating as well as the construction costs, of a plant at Wolf Creek are considered, the total costs of a nuclear plant would be lower than for a coal plant. This evaluation was included in the staff's Final Environmental Statement and was presented to the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board during the hearing process. Following the hearing, the Board issued a decision in which it concluded that the total costs of a nuclear plant would be lower than for a coal plant. This decision was later affirmed by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Appeal Board.

You commented on the matter of nuclear waste. Only spent fuel, which would be discharged periodically from the Wolf Creek reactor, will be stored at the site. This spent fuel will be stored in the spent fuel storage facility until such time that it can be transferred to a permanent storage facility to be constructed by the Federal Government. Although I cannot predict at this time when the permanent storage facility will be available, it probably will not be available before 1990. In order to accommodate the number of spent fuel elements that will accumulate until the permanent storage facility is available, various utilities are increasing the capacity of their existing spent fuel storage facilities and/or making arrangements to ship the spent fuel to facilities with available storage capacity. However, any expansion of fuel pool storage capacity must be reviewed and approved by the NRC.

You state that you feel that the questions asked by the NRC staff were "crumbs" handed to the public to assure that the staff was doing its job. I regret that you feel as you do. As I stated earlier, the meeting was held as a technical discussion between the applicant and the staff regarding the concrete strength of the Wolf Creek base mat. We were aware of the public's interest in this matter and made a sincere effort to give the public a view of our review process, of which a technical meeting is only a part. Meetings are conducted primarily to present information and to provide opportunity for questioning and clarification. They are not the forum for ruling on whether the information presented is acceptable or not. The responsibility still rests with the applicant to prove its case.

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Ms. Wanda Christy

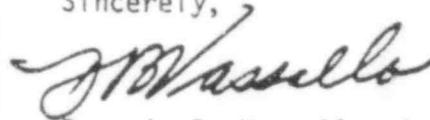
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You state that there is no need to delay our decision on the concrete and that it is a delay for time so that the utility could complete more of the plant. We have not delayed our decision on this matter. The reason a decision has not been made to date is that we have not completed our review. As soon as we reach a decision, we will inform the applicant and the public without delay. With regard to the construction activities currently in progress at Wolf Creek, none is in the areas which could be affected by our decision on this base mat matter. For the structure that could be affected by our decision; i.e., the containment building, the applicant has imposed a voluntary hold on construction which has been in effect since December 1978.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize again that we will reach a decision, on the matter of the concrete strength of the base mat, as quickly as we can and that the primary consideration in reaching a decision will be to assure a minimum of risk to the public health and safety.

Sincerely,



Domenic B. Vassallo, Assistant Director
for Light Water Reactors
Division of Project Management

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