



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

JUN 06 1979

(NRC PUBLIC DOCUMENT ROOM)

Mr. Carl J. Hemmer
and Mrs. Patricia A. Hemmer
3212 Beech Tree Ct.
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hemmer:

This is in response to your letter of March 18 to the President regarding the orders by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on March 13 to shut down five nuclear power plants in the eastern United States because of questions about the ability of their piping systems to withstand earthquakes.

Shortly before those orders were issued, it became apparent to NRC staff that analysis techniques which had been used in the seismic design of safety-related piping for these five plants were not in accord with proven and generally accepted engineering practices. The result could be over-stressing of piping and supports for earthquakes which might occur during the lifetimes of these plants. The eastern United States is generally believed to be a region of low seismicity, when compared to the western part of the country, but it is not without significant historical seismic activity. Attached is a map showing the location and intensity of earthquakes that have occurred in your region.

Some of the piping systems involved could, if failure occurred, cause loss of coolant to the nuclear reactor. In addition, systems needed to shut the plant down safely in that event could also be affected. Thus, an earthquake of not extremely low likelihood would have the potential both for causing an accident and for preventing operation of safety systems designed to cope with the accident. Whether or not such an earthquake caused damage in populated areas, it is essential that any serious radiological contamination be prevented.

Our objective is to review the situation in an expedited and disciplined manner so that the plants can be returned to operation with assurance that this will not constitute a threat to the public health and safety. We are mindful of the economic hardships that can occur as a result of plant shut-downs and are working as hard as we can to avoid any unnecessary delays in

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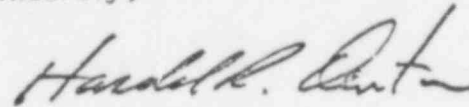
Mr. Carl J. Hemmer
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bringing the plants back on line. After completion of reanalysis and modifications of the piping systems, the NRC on May 24 terminated the shutdown order for one of the five plants, the Maine Yankee Atomic Power Station. Reanalysis or review of the other plants is in progress.

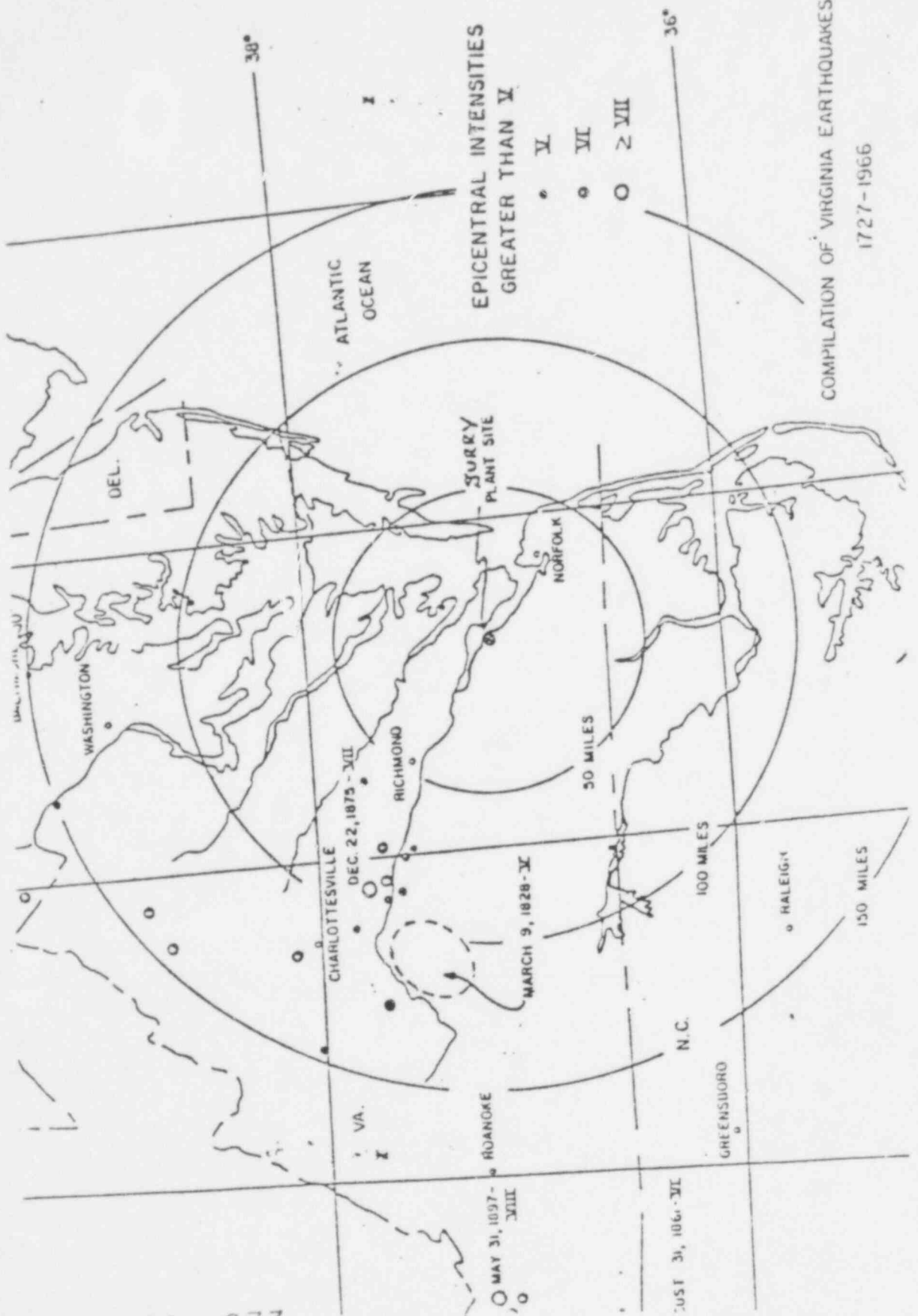
Sincerely,



Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor
Regulation

Enclosure:
Earthquake Map for Virginia

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