

NRC PUBLIC DOCUMENT ROOM

13

DOCKET NUMBER
PROPOSED RULE PR-140 (44FR 43128)

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August 4, 1979

Editor
The Washington Post
Washington, D.C.

POOR
ORIGINAL



Dear Sir,

I would like to briefly comment on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's tentative decision to classify the Three Mile Island mishap as not an extraordinary event. If this tentative decision is finalized, it will lead myself and others to the conclusion that our government officials are indeed irresponsible at best.

Rewording the phrase, "not an extraordinary event" to now read, "an ordinary event" suggests that a near melt-down is (as Webster's defines ordinary) of a kind to be expected in the normal order of events. Three Mile Island was only in operation for a year when this mishap occurred, so the American public can unmistakably assume that with such a ruling, near melt-downs can be expected in the normal order of events a year or so after other plants similarly constructed have been in operation.

It can also be assumed that if there are near melt-downs in other nuclear power facilities and the detection devices surrounding these facilities are limited or non-existent (as was the case around the TMI facility) the NRC would rule that nobody received 20 rems of exposure.

Under the Price-Anderson Act of 1968, TMI could also be classified as an "extraordinary event" if five or more people were killed or hospitalized. Since the NRC concedes that it does not know the dangers of low level radiation, and even is undertaking a joint venture with the United States Public Health Service to assess the medical effects of low level radiation, it does indeed seem premature to characterize the TMI incident as having killed no one.

The total quantity and quality of nuclear knowledge since 1968 has increased dramatically, and the NRC should urge Congress to amend the Price-Anderson Act to include this knowledge to provide the American public with an acceptable definition of what should be classified as an "extraordinary nuclear occurrence."

Sincerely,

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William A. Hess

Acknowledged by card.....8/21 *judic*

PC: Senator Sarbanes
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