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February 2, 1979

The Honorable Joseph M. Hendrie
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Dr. Hendrie:

SUBJECT: NRC Press Release #79-19 of January 19, 1979,
concerning NRC's policy statement on Reactor
Safety Study (WASH-1400) and the review of the
Lewis Panel.

The Illinois Commission on Atomic Energy (ICAE) has studied the above-referenced press release, as well as the report of the Ad Hoc Review Group chaired by Dr. H. W. Lewis. The ICAE has further taken notice of the coverage by the media (networks and newspaper) of the NRC press release.

It is with surprise and concern that the ICAE has noticed the considerable differences between, on the one hand, the NRC press release and the resulting coverage by the media, and, on the other hand, the content of the Lewis Report.

Whereas, the Lewis Report strikes, on the whole, a positive tone regarding the achievements of the RSS (WASH 1400), the NRC press release is from the start extremely critical. As examples may serve, the following:

From the Summary and Findings of the Lewis Report

"We find that WASH 1400 was a conscientious and honest effort to apply the methods of fault-tree/event-tree analysis to an extremely complex system."

"We do find that the methodology which was an important advance over earlier methodology applied to reactor risks, is sound and should be developed and used more widely, and we recommend the faster pace."

"WASH 1400 was a substantial advance over previous attempts to estimate the risks of the nuclear option."

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From the NRC Press Release, second paragraph

" the Review Group was critical of the Executive Summary, the procedures followed in producing the final report, and the calculations in the body of the report."

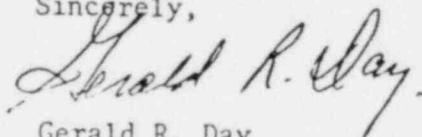
From the above quotes, one notices that the NRC press release in one front hard page single sentence fully discredits the RSS, whereas the Lewis Report, though pointing out some shortcomings of the RSS, also placed extreme emphasis on the value and considerable achievements of the RSS.

The authors of RSS (N. Rasmussen, S. Levine, et al) have always cautioned that their work, being a first-of-a-kind, should not be directly applied in the licensing process but rather should be used to weigh the relative importance of various safety issues and to guide safety related research. They have also advocated that further work in the probabilistic risks assessment area should be performed in order to extend the studies done already; this is a recommendation that is now also made in the Lewis Study.

The ICAE is concerned that the NRC press release and the coverage by the media do not accurately reflect the findings of the Lewis Study. The ICAE is of the opinion that injustice was done to the authors of the RSS by discrediting one-sidedly their work without placing adequate emphasis on their considerable achievements. Furthermore, since the RSS was not used for direct licensing purposes, the ICAE feels that the findings of the Lewis Study do not affect the safety of the currently operating nuclear power plants, and regrets that this was not pointed out with sufficient clarity in the NRC press release.

In view of the above, the ICAE would greatly appreciate receiving further information regarding the considerations that led to the issuance of the NRC press release of 1/19/79; in particular the ICAE would like to be informed regarding the procedure followed for reaching the 1/19/79 press release; and, if possible, concerning the individual positions taken by each of the NRC Commissioners with respect to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Gerald R. Day
Executive Director

GRD:gfs