



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

COMMISSION
CONFIDENTIAL

OFFICE OF THE
CHAIRMAN

September 2, 1980

The Honorable Wendell H. Ford
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Ford:

This is in reply to your letter dated July 29, 1980, concerning the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's available expertise to assess the adequacy of safety-related construction work at the Marble Hill nuclear plant.

Regarding the work performed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Marble Hill, the Corps was contracted by the NRC to provide an independent assessment of the U.S. Testing Company testing methods and equipment. This work, which was the only function concerning concrete performed by the Corps for the NRC at Marble Hill, could well have been performed by NRC inspectors. However, in this case it was our judgment that an independent review would be prudent in view of the broad scope and uncertainty of the allegations received by the NRC including some adverse implications concerning our objectivity in investigating the U.S. Testing Company activities.

It is not unusual for the NRC to obtain independent assessments by others not directly involved at a site. This is done for reasons which include temporary work overloads, verification of test results, to obtain fresh viewpoints, and to assure proper and uniform enforcement of NRC requirements. In addition to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Bureau of Standards, independent testing laboratories, individual consultants, and specialists from other NRC Regions and Headquarters staff are used in this function.

Region III inspectors have performed independent inspections at facilities located in other regions and inspectors from those regions have performed inspections at Region III facilities. We will continue to ask for independent inspections and assessments at Marble Hill as the need indicates.

Three civil-structural inspectors are assigned to the Region III Construction Branch. Among these three inspectors, one possesses a Doctorate, another a Masters and the third a Bachelors degree in Civil Engineering. Their construction related experience totals 24 years, of which 20 years were in the nuclear field. The supervisor of this group has over 32 years experience in the nuclear field including 10 years with the AEC/NRC.

8010020 403

4

In addition to the three civil-structural inspectors, there are eight other inspectors or supervisors at the Region III Office who possess significant civil engineering inspection experience, and who are available for use at Marble Hill if needed. Civil engineering inspectors at the four other regional offices are also available; in fact a civil-structural inspector with 22 years experience in construction design from the Region II Office has performed several inspections at Marble Hill. Further, the senior civil-structural engineering specialist from NRC IE Headquarters is deeply involved in a parallel effort with the two structural consultants. He possesses a Masters degree in structural engineering and 18 years of design and construction experience of which 14 years have been in the nuclear field. Of that 14 years, 11 years have been with the AEC/NRC, serving several years in major offices of the Commission directly related to the technical aspects of nuclear power plants. These include licensing, standards and inspection/enforcement. He also has served on the two national code committees which have standardized the requirements for all safety-related concrete construction in nuclear power plants since the first was formed in the late 1960's.

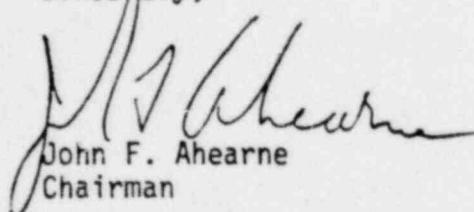
Where the expertise of other offices within the NRC is required, it can be obtained by arrangement between office directors as is the case in many instances. NRC Headquarters has available additional engineering specialists who can and are utilized on specific technical issues. If one were to examine the capabilities of personnel in the other various technical disciplines in the NRC a similar pattern would be evident. Based on these resources, we feel that the NRC has adequate in-house expertise to competently carry out an effective inspection program at Marble Hill.

It should be pointed out that concrete flaws at Marble Hill were identified by Region III civil-structural inspectors during inspections conducted in April 1979. As a result of these findings of excessive honey-combing, inadequate repairs and other problems related to concrete, a meeting was held with the president and other corporate personnel of Public Service of Indiana. The purpose of this meeting, held on May 15, 1979, was to emphasize NRC concerns and to obtain management commitments for corrective actions. This all occurred before the NRC received the first allegation regarding concrete problems at Marble Hill.

A goal of having no adverse comments about the NRC inspection program is not achievable. The NRC goal is to ensure a facility is constructed to a high quality level such that minor flaws, which will always be present in a project, do not adversely impact safe operation.

I trust that this letter is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,


John F. Ahearne
Chairman