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

FEBRUARY 25 1980

Docket No. 50-338

Mr. W. L. Proffitt
Senior Vice President - Power
Virginia Electric and Power Company
Post Office Box 2666
Richmond, Virginia 23261

Dear Mr. Proffitt:

During the last several years, data have begun to indicate that the fission gas release rate from LWR fuel pellets is increased (enhanced) with burnup. Many of the current fuel performance analyses do not consider the impact of burnup-enhanced release on safety. By letters dated November 23, 1976, the NRC staff requested all LWR licensees to assess the higher fission gas release for fuel burnups above 20,000 Megawatt-day per metric ton (MWD/t).

Also, by NRC staff letter dated January 18, 1978, all U. S. LWR fuel suppliers were requested to revise their fuel performance analyses to include the enhancement of fission gas release at higher burnups.

All responses to the November 23, 1976 letters have been reviewed. We have concluded that no immediate licensing action is required for operating reactors. This conclusion is valid for typical reported LWR fuel bundle and batch burnups. Any extension of these burnups or other factors which significantly affect fission gas release, LOCA PCT or fuel rod internal pressure is outside the scope of the conclusion.

Westinghouse was the only fuel supplier calculating that the increased release would cause internal fuel rod pressure to exceed coolant system pressure. The staff has approved revised design criteria which allow internal rod pressures greater than system pressure. The staff is also completing the review of a Westinghouse revised fuel performance code. The staff, in evaluating reloads, has been requesting licensees using Westinghouse fuel to quantify the burnup when the newly approved design criteria will be violated. In the reloads evaluated thus far, there appears to be a significant burnup margin to the newly approved evaluated design criteria to compensate for modifications which may result from the staff's review of the Westinghouse revised fuel performance code.

Inasmuch as you and/or the staff will be evaluating all future reloads against fuel vendors' revised fuel performance codes which provide for increase in fission gas release at higher burnups, we consider this a satisfactory resolution of this concern.

Sincerely,

A. Schwencer, Chief
Operating Reactors Branch #1
Division of Operating Reactors

cc: See next page

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Mr. J. H. Ferguson
Virginia Electric and Power Company

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cc: Mr. Anthony Gambardella
Office of the Attorney General
11 South 12th Street - Room 308
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Richard M. Foster, Esquire
1230 A Pearl Street
Denver, Colorado 80203

Michael W. Maupin, Esquire
Hunton, Williams, Gay and Gibson
P. O. Box 1535
Richmond, Virginia 23212

Mrs. June Allen
412 Owens Drive
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Mr. James Torson
501 Leroy
Socorro, New Mexico 87801

Mrs. Margaret Dietrich
Route 2, Box 568
Gordonsville, Virginia 22042

Ellyn R. Weiss, Esquire
Sheldon, Harmon, Roisman and Weiss
1725 I Street, N.W., Suite 506
Washington, D. C. 20006

Mr. James C. Dunstan
State Corporation Commission
Commonwealth of Virginia
Blandon Building
Richmond, Virginia 23209

Mr. A. D. Johnson, Chairman
Board of Supervisors of Louisa County
Trevillians, Virginia 23170

Mr. Michael S. Kidd
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
P. O. Box 128
Spotsylvania, Virginia 22553

Director, Technical Assessment Division
Office of Radiation Programs (AW-459)
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Crystal Mall #2
Arlington, Virginia 20460

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region III Office
ATTN: EIS COORDINATOR
Curtis Building
6th and Walnut Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Alderman Library
Manuscripts Department
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22901

Mr. Edward Kube
Board of Supervisors
Louisa County Courthouse
P. O. Box 27
Louisa, Virginia 23093

Mr. J. B. Jackson, Jr.
Commonwealth of Virginia
Council on the Environment
903 Ninth Street Office Building
Richmond, Virginia 23129

Mr. Paul W. Purdom
Environmental Studies Institute
Drexel University
32nd and Chestnut Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Mr. J. H. Ferguson
Virginia Electric and Power Company

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cc: Mr. W. P. Cartwright, Station Manager
P. O. Box 402
Mineral, Virginia 23117

Alan S. Rosenthal, Esquire
Atomic Safety and Licensing Appeal Board
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555

Michael C. Farrar, Esquire
Atomic Safety and Licensing Appeal Board
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555

Dr. John H. Buck
Atomic Safety and Licensing Appeal Board
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555

Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555