



OFFICE OF THE  
CHAIRMAN

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

July 10, 1980

The Honorable Jack Brooks  
Chairman, Committee on Government  
Operations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On April 1, 1980, the Comptroller General of the United States issued a report to the Subcommittee on Energy and Power, and the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce entitled "Existing Nuclear Sites Can Be Used for New Power Plants and Nuclear Waste Storage." The report contains several recommendations to the Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to submit to your Committee a written statement on action taken on General Accounting Office recommendations within 60 days after the date of the report.

Actions taken to date along with future actions relating to the report are described in the enclosure to this letter.

I am glad to have the opportunity to report to you on this subject.

Sincerely,

John F. Ahearne  
Chairman

Enclosure:  
Actions Taken and Planned  
Regarding the Use of Existing  
Nuclear Sites for Locating New  
Power Plants and for Storing  
Nuclear Wastes

cc: Representative Frank Horton

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ACTIONS TAKEN AND PLANNED REGARDING  
THE USE OF EXISTING NUCLEAR SITES FOR LOCATING  
NEW POWER PLANTS AND FOR STORING NUCLEAR WASTES

GAO Recommendations to the Chairman of NRC on Power Plants

The Chairman, Nuclear Regulatory Commission should specify in NRC's alternative site evaluation regulation that utilities must include available existing sites among their alternative sites for new nuclear power plants.

The Chairman, Nuclear Regulatory Commission should also:

- determine if there are inherent advantages to limiting the number of nuclear power plant sites by locating new power plants at existing sites,
- determine the weight any such advantages should receive in environmental cost/benefit balancing, and in conjunction,
- develop a policy on the use of existing sites for new nuclear power plants which recognizes environmental advantages and potential constraints on practical implementation.

NRC Response

Siting of nuclear power plants requires consideration of a number of concerns and objectives, many of which are competing. There are advantages to locating new nuclear power plants on sites already hosting another nuclear unit; there are also disadvantages to that action. The NRC staff has provided guidance to applicants concerning specific considerations when proposing to add a nuclear unit to an existing generating station.

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Most of the advantages relate to limiting the number of sites and land area committed to nuclear generation and confining the associated impacts to those fewer locations. Among the most frequently mentioned potential advantages are: easing of the problem of decommissioning, reduction of the number and length of transmission lines, reduction of visual, ecological and socioeconomic impact, easier licensing process and higher quality of operation as a result of concentration of operation within fewer more experienced utilities.

The most commonly identified potential disadvantages are: inequitable distribution of societal risks, negative effects on national security of concentration of generating capacity, overload of water bodies, negative effect on grid stability and system reliability, conflicts with local and state regulations, antitrust laws, and the concept of remote siting.

The technical and non-technical merits in each case are different, very site specific, and only upon a careful examination of case specific facts can the NRC staff draw conclusions as to which course of action to take. NRC is committed to exploration of site attributes through an impartial comparison of alternatives conducted as part of a NEPA process.

The NRC regulations provide an opportunity for a thorough review of the relative merits of alternative sites in each case, including the determination of all inherent advantages existing sites might have and the weight such advantages should receive. The NRC is presently in the formal process of receiving public comments on the proposed revision to 10 CFR Part 51 rule providing "licensing

and Regulatory Policy and Procedures for Environmental Protection; Alternative Site Reviews," published in the Federal Register on April 9, 1980. The proposed rule would not require specific consideration of existing nuclear sites, although it would not prevent it. The GAO report and the recommendation that the rule specify that utilities must include available existing sites among their alternative sites will be considered by the NRC in the context of this rulemaking activity.

In addition, the NRC is engaged in a major rulemaking effort to review its basic siting policy. The effort is broad in scope and will emphasize the goal of siting new nuclear power plants away from densely populated areas and the capability for taking effective emergency actions. It will consider the collocation of nuclear facilities. The GAO report also will be considered by NRC in this rulemaking activity.

#### GAO Recommendations to the Chairman of NRC on Nuclear Waste

Before permitting utilities to store low-level waste at nuclear power plant sites the Chairman, Nuclear Regulatory Commission should require the utilities to provide specific plans for eventually disposing of these wastes, including assurances that funds will be available for disposal costs.

#### NRC Response

The NRC supports this GAO recommendation. This recommendation is consistent with current NRC efforts toward requiring NRC licensees to have plans for eventually disposing of these wastes in disposal facilities.

Several policy papers are presently in preparation addressing issues such as the waste volume minimization, waste volume reduction, and licensing requirements for long term

(defined as life-of-the-plant) onsite storage. The papers explore the major available options.

The NRC staff is also undertaking a review of the broad question of decommissioning nuclear power plants which includes the question of obtaining from licensees the assurance that funds will be available to carry out the prescribed methods of decommissioning in the future. Plans to decommission nuclear reactor sites must include plans for ultimate disposal of related low-level nuclear wastes. Similarly, the method of providing assurance of funding for decommissioning must include the necessary funding for disposing of nuclear wastes from the sites. The staff's efforts will result in rulemaking proceedings related to decommissioning in general, and the funding of decommissioning specifically. Present schedule calls for the publication of a generic environmental impact statement in January, 1981, a decommissioning policy statement in September, 1981 and a proposed rule in January, 1982.

Additionally, we wish to point out the President's message of February 12, 1980, on radioactive wastes management. In that message the President stated that by Executive Order he was establishing a State Planning Council. The Council will advise the Executive Branch and work with the Congress to address radioactive waste management issues, such as planning and siting, construction, and operation of facilities. He also stated that the Department of Energy is preparing a detailed National Plan for Nuclear Waste Management. The Plan will include specific program goals and milestones for all aspects of nuclear waste management.