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

JAN 8 1980

Mrs. Linda Young
RD#1
Lewisberry, PA 17339

Dear Mrs. Young:

I am writing in response to your letter of April 11, 1979, to Dr. Joseph Hendrie regarding your concern for public health and the health of your children as a result of the accident at Three Mile Island. I regret that this answer to your letter has been delayed. The accident and its consequences have created a substantial increase in the agency's workload, which has prevented us from responding to you as promptly as we would have liked to. I am authorized by Dr. Hendrie to reply to you regarding public safety.

The preliminary findings on the health effects of the radioactive materials released by the accident are contained in the interagency task force report, "Population Dose and Health Impact of the Accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Station" (NUREG-0558). A summary of the report is included here for your information. The radioactive materials that were released were primarily radioactive gases. The radioactivity was almost entirely from xenon, which is a chemically inactive gas. As the gases leaked out, the winds diluted them. The very small dose of radiation that was received by people in the area came from radioactive gases that escaped from the auxiliary building. The average dose of radioactivity received by the population within 50 miles of Three Mile Island was approximately 4 millirems. The maximum exposure to any individual was less than 100 millirems, which is less than the yearly dose each person receives as a result of natural background radiation. Doses at these levels result in less than one health effect over the lifetime of all people in this area. Natural background radiation received by people in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, area is approximately 125 millirems per year. To put these doses into perspective, it should be noted that a traveler flying round trip in a jet between New York City and Los Angeles receives 5 millirems from cosmic rays in the natural background. However, infants and preschool-age children are more sensitive to some radioactive compounds than older people. Thus, in the precautionary advice given, the suggestion was made that the very young be moved from the Three Mile Island area.

With regard to your comments concerning the possible future operation of Three Mile Island Unit 1, the Commission has ordered that a public hearing be

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conducted to determine whether the facility should be operated and, if so, under what conditions restart of Unit 1 would take place. Prior to start of the hearings, the NRC staff will conduct a review of technical information concerning the restart of Unit 1. As part of this review, the NRC staff will conduct meetings with the licensee in the presence of the public, and the public will be given the opportunity to raise questions and to make statements. During the hearing, the technical issues which are appropriate to assure the public health and safety will also be addressed. In addition, the Hearing Board may consider the psychological impact of future operation on the nearby communities. A copy of the Commission Order which outlines the issues to be considered is enclosed for your information.

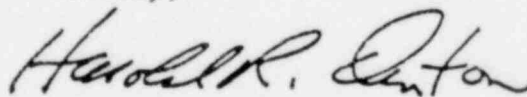
With regard to Three Mile Island Unit 2, the licensee has not yet sent to the NRC a proposal for plant recovery, although the licensee is conducting feasibility studies. It is not possible at this time to determine when such proposals for recovery may be submitted or how much time will be needed for the required reviews and approvals in connection with Unit 2's recovery. I would note, however, that the licensee's authority to operate Unit 2, except for those actions necessary to keep the reactor shut down, was suspended by Order of July 20, 1979.

Metropolitan Edison (Met Ed) customers will not have to pay for any damages to, or for the restoration of, Three Mile Island Unit 2. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, in a decision and order of June 15, 1979, ruled that customers of Met Ed and the Pennsylvania Electric Company would be free from accident expenses, except for those costs associated with purchasing power to replace power that would have been provided by the TMI facility.

While we are, of course, concerned about financial impacts on consumers, the NRC's primary responsibility is the assurance of public health and safety. State public utility commissions and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission have primary responsibility regarding the rates that consumers pay for electricity. They should be able to provide information for your use.

I appreciate your concerns and assure you that every effort is being made to ensure the continued protection of the health and safety of the public, not only at the Three Mile Island Station, but also at all nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,



Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Encl: Summary of NUREG-0558
Commission Order