

Docket 50-289
70-320

REGULATORY DOCKET FILE COPY

DEC 28 1979

Ms. Helen K. Kirk, Secretary-Treasurer
Board of Supervisors, Lower Paxton Township
75 South Houcks Road, Suite 206
Harrisburg, PA 17109

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Dear Ms. Kirk:

This letter is in response to the Resolution by the Board of Supervisors, Lower Paxton Township, of October 8, 1979, regarding the release of contaminated water into the Susquehanna and the possible future operation of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Reactors, Unit 1 and 2 (TMI-1 and 2).

With regard to future operation of TMI-1, on July 2, 1979, the Commission ordered that TMI-1 remain in a cold shutdown condition until further order by the Commission and stated that a public hearing would be held prior to restart of TMI-1. The Commission believes that public participation is a vital ingredient in dealing with those matters related to the TMI-1 restart.

On August 9, 1979, the Commission issued an additional Order on TMI-1 specifying the basis for the Shutdown Order and the procedures to govern the hearing regarding any TMI-1 restart. On the basis of that hearing the Commission will determine whether any further operation will be permitted and, if so, under what conditions. I have enclosed a copy of the August 9, 1979, Order for your information.

The Commission's Order also identifies a number of items that must be resolved prior to restart. These items, listed on pages 5-7 of the Order, include but go beyond those required for restart of other Babcock & Wilcox (B&W) designed pressurized water reactors similar to TMI-1 and 2. Included in these additional items are those recommended by the Lessons Learned Task Force which studied the TMI accident.

As for future operation of TMI-2, the licensee has not yet submitted to the NRC a proposal for overall 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 shutdown, was suspended by Order of July 20, 1979.

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Ms. Helen K. Kirk

- 2 -

With regard to your concern about the release of contaminated water, except for releases of liquids containing only low or nondetectable levels of radioactivity to the Susquehanna River, such releases are not currently permitted. Before such releases take place, the impact will be evaluated by the NRC and the evaluation will be made available to the public. By this course of action, we will assure that a thorough assessment is completed prior to release of the contaminated liquids and that the health and safety of the offsite population will be protected.

As a result of releases containing only low or nondetectable levels of radioactivity, the levels of radioactivity in the Susquehanna are indistinguishable from existing background levels at public water supply intakes from the river. These levels have been confirmed by independent measurements made by NRC, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

With regard to concerns about the radiation released from TMI-2, a very small dose of radiation was received by people in the area and this came from the radioactive gases that escaped from the auxiliary building. The average dose of radioactivity received by the population within 50 miles of TMI 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 from New York to Los Angeles receives 5 millirems of cosmic rays.

With respect to alternative methods of energy production, such as solar, wind, and geothermal, the Department of Energy is the Federal Agency responsible for their research and development. NRC considers these alternative methods of energy production in its assessment of the environmental impact of each nuclear power plant as part of our overall review of each utility's application for a construction permit or an operating license. To date, we have determined that alternative methods of energy production are neither technically nor economically feasible to provide the required amount of power at the time it is needed. However, the NRC certainly endorses efforts to promote energy conservation.

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Ms. Helen K. Kirk

- 3 -

I understand the concerns of the Board of Supervisors and would like to 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,

Original [unclear]
H. R. Denton

Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure:
Order, dtd 8/9/79

bcc: The White House

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