



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

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JAN 8 1980

Alice and George Herman
R.D. #5
York, PA 17402

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Herman:

Your letters of April 16, May 26, and July 30, 1979 to Commissioner Hendrie and the Secretary of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding the Three Mile Island accident have been forwarded to me for reply. I regret that the marked increase in Commission work load as a result of the accident has prevented my writing to you until now. I will respond here to the questions raised by you in your three letters.

With regard to your comments concerning the possible future operation of Three Mile Island, the Commission has ordered that a public hearing be conducted to determine whether Three Mile Island Unit 1 should be operated and, if so, under what conditions restart of the unit 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. Enclosed also is a summary of one investigation into the accident, NUREG-0600.

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.

I understand your dissatisfaction with the use of the terms "insignificant" and "not significant" to quantify amounts of radiation. At Three Mile Island, 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

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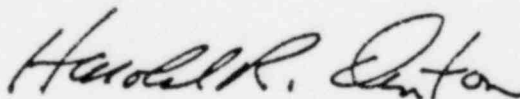
result in less than one health effect over the lifetime of all people in this area. Natural background radiation received by people in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, area is approximately 125 millirems per year. To put these doses into perspective, it should be noted that a traveler flying round trip in a jet between New York City and Los Angeles receives 5 millirems from cosmic rays in the natural background.

A team of investigators from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare calculated the doses to the people living within 50 miles of the Three Mile Island site and estimated the number of new cancers that would result from the exposure to the radioactivity that leaked out of the plant. The team published their work in a report entitled "Population Dose and Health Impact of the Accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Station" (NUREG-0558). They concluded that the offsite collective dose associated with radioactive material released from March 28, 1979, to April 7, 1979, represents minimal risks (that is, a very small number of additional health effects to the offsite population). Enclosed for your information is a summary of NUREG-0558.

The Department of Health and Human Services (formerly Health, Education and Welfare), the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, are funding a series of studies on the health effects, mental health consequences, and economic consequences arising from the evacuation and exposure to low levels of radiation. I suggest you contact them directly for information about any accidents associated with the evacuation.

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

Enclosures:

1. Summary of NUREG-0558
2. Summary of NUREG-0600
3. Commission Order, Docket No. 50-289