

JAN 8 1980

The Honorable John Heinz
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Heinz:

I am writing in reply to your letter of November 2, 1979, regarding questions submitted by Mr. James F. Ulrich, a constituent, in his letter to you of October 27, 1979. I regret that this answer to your letter has been delayed.

The responses to the questions in Mr. Ulrich's letter are as stated below:

1. What is being done about the Nuclear Power Plant at 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 Unit 1 would take place. Prior to the hearings, the NRC staff is conducting a review of technical information concerning the restart of Unit 1. As part of this review, the NRC staff is conducting meetings with the licensee in the presence of the public, and the public is being given the opportunity to raise questions and to make statements. During the hearings, the technical issues which are appropriate to assure the public health and safety will also be addressed.

As for TMI-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.

2. Is there any way that they can stop the accumulation of the waste material?

Radioactive waste is expected to be generated as a result of cleanup operations at TMI-2. The very act of decontaminating and cleaning up the contaminated water in the reactor building, the reactor building itself, and other equipment produces radioactive waste. We will require that the production, storage and shipment of the waste is handled in such

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a manner that the health and safety of the public will be protected. The Commission has ordered the preparation of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the impact of the cleanup operation on the environment.

3. Will the process of cleaning up the waste work?

I assume that this question refers to the process of cleaning up decontaminated water. There are a number of proven and tested methods for decontaminating water that are currently in use in industry. One method in use at Three Mile Island is based on de-ionization. The de-ionizer removes the radioactive ions from the water in much the same way hardness is removed from water in household water softeners. The Commission has recently authorized the use of EPICOR-II, which is based on de-ionizing, to process the contaminated water stored in tanks in the auxiliary building. To date, the decontamination of water processed through the system has been better than predicted.

4. How safe is the water that is to be dumped into the Susquehanna River?

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. This discharge of water processed through the EPICOR-II system has not been authorized. 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 off-site 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 the NRC, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. An example of the type of evaluation that will be performed is the environmental assessment prepared by the NRC staff concerning the use of EPICOR-II to process contaminated water from the auxiliary building. This assessment addresses only the processing of the water and not its disposal. Prior to disposal, another assessment will be prepared to evaluate the alternative disposal means. A copy of the environmental assessment is enclosed for your information.

5. Is a meltdown still a possibility?

The TMI-2 reactor has been shut down for about ten months, so that the heat generated from decay heat is very small and will continue to

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diminish as time passes. Under these conditions, fuel meltdown is not possible.

I trust these responses have addressed the questions raised in your constituent's letter.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY T. G. SMITH

Lee V. Gossick
Executive Director for Operations

Enclosure:
"Environmental Assessment -
Use of EPICOR-II," 8/14/79

DISTRIBUTION COPIES:
Docket No's 50-289/50-320

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Handwritten notes:
12/26/79
objection
comments noted

OFFICE →	TMI TF <i>SM</i>	D/TMI Supp.	ELD <i>objection</i>	NRR	NRR	EDO
SURNAME →	SMiner/mc	RVollmer	<i>WCHANDLER</i>	ECase	HDenton	
DATE →	12/26/79	12/26/79	12/26/79			