

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

February 28, 1980

Mr. & Mrs. Carroll Hughes
621 South Broad Street
Lititz, Pennsylvania 17543THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS
POOR QUALITY PAGES

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hughes:

Your letters to President Carter and to Commissioner Hendrie expressing your concern about the release of radioactive gases from the Three Mile Island nuclear station and your desire to close the facility permanently have been referred to me for response. I regret that this answer 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.

The release of radioactive gases from the reactor building of TMI Unit 2 is not currently permitted. Before the gases are disposed of by any method, NRC will evaluate the impact and the evaluation will be made available to the public. The Commission has also decided that concerned citizens should be given the opportunity to present their views orally at a public meeting prior to any approval of proposals to dispose of radioactive gases in the TMI Unit 2 reactor building. By this course of action, we will assure that a thorough assessment is completed prior to release of the contaminated gases and that the health and safety of the offsite population will be protected.

The origin of the krypton-85 is the release of fission products into the containment building during the accident. Other fission products, primarily xenons and iodines, had activity levels far in excess of the krypton-85 immediately following the accident. They decay relatively quickly, however, and are now at very low levels. The krypton-85, with a 10.5-year half-life, has not decayed significantly and, thus, 10 months after the accident, has become the dominant form of radioactivity in the containment building atmosphere.

Metropolitan Edison Company recently submitted to NRC a "Safety Analysis and Environmental Report" (November 12, 1979) in which it evaluated alternative methods for the disposal of the krypton gases. The report states that the "optimum choice from an environmental impact standpoint when potential accidents are considered is atmospheric dispersion through controlled purging of the reactor building atmosphere." This gradual venting, the report estimates, will result in releases below levels allowed for normal nuclear power plant operation, as set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations (10 CFR Part 50, Appendix I). This venting might result in a maximum dose of less than 1 millirem of whole-body radiation.

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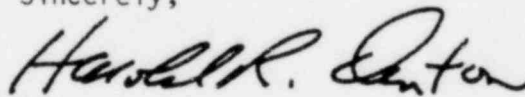
Before authorizing venting or any other disposal methods of the krypton gas, NRC will prepare an environmental assessment to determine potential environmental effects of the alternative methods and will request public comments on the assessment.

With regard to your desire to close TMI permanently, the Commission has ordered that a public hearing be conducted to determine whether TMI Unit 1 should be operated and, if so, under what conditions the restart 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 that 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 that outlines the issues to be considered is enclosed for your information.

With regard to Unit 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 shut down, was suspended by Order of July 20, 1979.

We 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.

Sincerely,



Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure: Commission Order dated August 9, 1979