

TERA

FEBRUARY 28 1980

Mr. Bernard Wolf
Beaver Run, RD #1
Glenmoore, Pennsylvania 19343

Dear Mr. Wolf:

Thank you for your letter about the release of radioactive materials from the Three Mile Island nuclear station. 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.

All discharges of water into the Susquehanna River have been carefully monitored since the accident occurred. Your letter refers to the release to the river of 4,000 gallons of water containing strontium-90, a radioactive element that emits beta radiation. The entire event started as a normal routine release of waste water from the Unit 1 waste evaporator condensate test tank. Prior to initiating a release, the licensee is required by plant technical specifications to sample the contents of the tank and analyze the sample for the principal gamma emitters. In addition, the licensee is required by the technical specifications to take a portion of that sample and add it to the composite sample of all previous batches of liquid releases made during the month. At the end of the month the composite sample is analyzed for strontium-89 and -90. The licensee completed both of these actions. It should be noted that the NRC does not require that the analysis for strontium be performed on every batch prior to release because the concentration of strontium is normally well below the detection limits of the analytical method and orders of magnitude lower than the principal gamma emitters, such as iodine and cesium.

On July 26, 1979, the release from Unit 1 was initiated; during the release an NRC inspector questioned the licensee as to whether or not a gross beta analysis had been performed. At that point, Metropolitan Edison management suspended the release and performed a number of analyses. The analysis for concentrations of strontium-89 and -90 indicated that prior to discharge to the river, the effluent concentrations for these isotopes were within both federal and state government standards for radioactivity. In the future, nevertheless, Metropolitan Edison will monitor all water discharges for beta radiation.

The release of radioactive gases from the reactor building of TMI Unit 2 and the release of contaminated water, except for releases to the Susquehanna such as those described above, are not currently permitted. Before any such releases take place, NRC will evaluate the impact and the evaluation will be made available

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to the public. By this course of action, we will assure that a thorough assessment is completed prior to release of the contaminated gases and liquids and that the health and safety of the offsite population will be protected.

The Commission recently authorized use of the EPICOR-II water treatment system for processing the waste water stored in tanks in the auxiliary building. We do not currently permit the discharge of water processed by the EPICOR-II system. The disposal of the water processed by EPICOR-II will be addressed in a separate environmental assessment, as required by the Commission's Statement of May 25, 1979. Copies of the environmental assessment will be made available for public comment. As Metropolitan Edison has not yet submitted a proposal on the disposal method of the decontaminated water, we have yet to prepare the environmental assessment. We anticipate that several months will pass before any decisions are made on disposal of the water.

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, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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,

[Handwritten signature]
Officially signed by
E. G. Case

Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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Docket 50-289/50-320
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