



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

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March 17, 1980

Professor Frederick Seitz
Chairman
Professor Miro M. Todorovich
Executive Secretary
Scientists and Engineers for
Secure Energy, Inc.
570 Seventh Avenue
New York, New York 10018

Dear Professors Seitz and Todorovich:

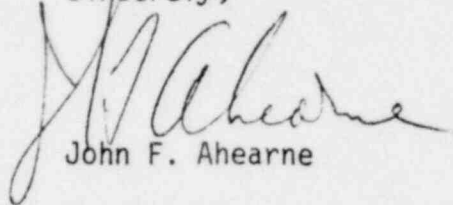
Thank you for your letter of January 17, 1980 on behalf of Scientists and Engineers for Secure Energy, Inc. The Commission agrees with you that there are pressing reasons why licensing of newly completed nuclear plants should not be unnecessarily delayed.

As your letter correctly notes, one of the lessons of the Three Mile Island accident emphasized both by the President's Commission and by the NRC's Special Inquiry Group, is that human factors are vital to safe nuclear plant operation. The Commission disagrees with your conclusion that licensing need not be delayed "while the Commission sorts out shortcomings that are other than technological." It is this agency's responsibility under the Atomic Energy Act to insist on reasonable assurance that public health and safety will be protected before we license new plants to operate. This safety mandate is not restricted solely to engineering design considerations.

The NRC is preparing an Action Plan to provide a sound basis for an end to the Commission's licensing pause in the relatively near future. We are evaluating this plan to develop safety objectives, detailed criteria and deadlines for their implementation, and schedules for resolution of remaining concerns. Completion should make possible a licensing program which reasonably assures public health and safety through carefully thought-out responses to the safety issues raised by the TMI accident. The costs of some delay now would appear small compared to the potential costs of failing to assure that further commitments to nuclear power are not vulnerable to the weaknesses exposed at Three Mile Island. As a means of reducing the potential economic costs of delays without compromising the aims of the licensing pause, the Commission has decided to consider authorizing newly completed plants to load fuel and perform zero power testing. The Commission has approved such an authorization for TVA's Sequoyah facility.

The Commission intends to issue soon a statement of policy which will describe the reason underlying the Sequoyah decision in greater detail. Later, after further consideration of the Action Plan, the Commission intends to issue a statement of policy which would summarize the Commission's conclusion with regard to the impact of Three Mile Island on the licensing process and will describe the conditions under which licensing for full power operation may resume. We would be interested in receiving your views on either or both of these statements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. F. Ahearne".

John F. Ahearne