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

APR 3 1990

Ms. Jeane J. Crumley  
P.O. Box 189  
Summerdale, PA 17093

Dear Ms. Crumley:

I am writing in response to your letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding the effects of the Three Mile Island accident. I regret that this answer to your letter has been delayed. The accident and its consequences have created a substantial increase in the agency's workload, which has prevented me from responding to you as promptly as I would have liked to.

The 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 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, note 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. Additional information concerning exposures may be found in the report titled "Population Dose and Health Impact of the Accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Station" (NUREG-0558), a summary of which I am enclosing here.

Extraordinary Nuclear Occurrence (ENO) is a term defined in the Atomic Energy Act of 1959, as amended (the Act), that identifies those nuclear accidents where compensation to people for damage or injuries will be on a no-fault basis. In the event of a nuclear accident resulting in minor damages, these no-fault provisions would not apply and normal legal procedures would be followed for persons submitting damage claims.

The NRC was given the authority in the Act to determine whether or not an accident can be classified as an ENO. The Act defines an ENO as an event that causes a discharge of radioactive materials in amounts causing offsite radiation levels which the Commission determines to be substantial and which the Commission determines has resulted or will result in substantial damages to offsite persons or property. The Commission was required by the Act to establish

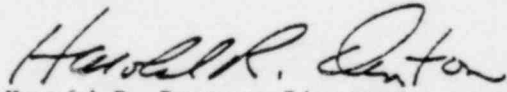
specific criteria in its regulations for making the ENO determination. Although the accident at TMI was not a normal occurrence and would be considered extraordinary in everyday language, a panel of senior NRC staff officials recommended that the accident does not meet specific criteria for an ENO set forth in the regulations. This recommendation is advisory, only the Commission will make the final determination of whether the TMI accident constitutes an ENO.

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 TMI-Unit 1 should be operated and, if so, under what conditions restart of Unit 1 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.

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 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

Encls: Summary of NUREG-0558  
Order and Notice of Hearing  
dated 8-9-79