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

APR 3 1980

Mr. Kevin Pletta
12839 Chippewa
Warren, MI 48093

Dear Mr. Pletta:

I am writing in response to your letter to Commissioner Joseph Hendrie requesting information on the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor. 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.

You asked if the public were "aware of what could happen during a nuclear plant accident." For every major project affecting the environment, including construction and operation of nuclear power plants, the public has access to information on the potential benefits, risks and costs of the project. Prior to the licensing of commercial nuclear power plants, the utility must analyze various hypothetical accidents at a specific site and the consequences of those accidents in an Environmental Report. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) presents these analyses in an Environmental Impact Statement that is available to the public. In addition, the NRC has performed a study to quantitatively analyze the risks from accidents at reactors. The Reactor Safety Study was released on October 30, 1975. All of these documents are available for public review in the NRC Public Document Room in Washington, DC, or in local public document rooms.

As part of the licensing process, the utility is required to have safeguards in the plant to ensure that offsite radiation releases in an accident are within acceptable levels.

"Meltdown" refers to the melting of fuel in an operating nuclear reactor due to excessive heat buildup following loss of reactor cooling water. If a significant portion of the fuel should melt, the molten fuel could melt through the reactor vessel, releasing large quantities of radioactive materials into the containment building. Reactors are designed, however, to provide an emergency supply of cooling water to the reactor core via several emergency systems.

With regard to your question regarding the building of more nuclear power plants, the former Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) had a Congressional mandate

to develop and promote nuclear energy. When the AEC was abolished in 1974, the NRC was created by Congress for the sole purpose of regulating the commercial production of nuclear energy. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is now responsible for the Federal Government's nuclear research and development activities. Consequently, questions about the future of this energy source should be directed to that agency.

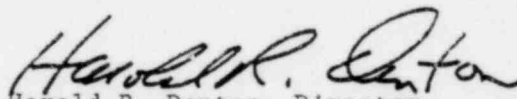
I am enclosing summaries of two reports which you should find interesting. In addition, both the President's Commission and the NRC Special Inquiry Group have completed their studies and published their reports. A copy of the report by the President's Commission may be obtained from:

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402

The report by the Special Inquiry Group can be obtained from:

Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Technical Information and Document Control
Washington, . 0555

Sincerely,


Harold R. Denton, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Encls: Summary of NUREG-0558
Summary of NUREG-0600