



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

Lea

April 3, 1980

Docket No. 50-312

Mr. J. J. Mattimoe
Assistant General Manager and
Chief Engineer
Sacramento Municipal Utility District
6201 S Street
P. O. Box 15830
Sacramento California 95813

Dear Mr. Mattimoe:

A number of concerns have been recently brought to our attention regarding the transient (known as "the light bulb incident") which occurred at the Rancho Seco Nuclear Generating Station on March 20, 1978. These concerns are stated in the enclosed memorandum dated March 14, 1980, from Robert M. Bernero and Frank H. Rowsome, of the NRC's Probabilistic Assessment Staff, to Harold R. Denton and Carl Michelson. The memorandum concluded that the transient at your facility could have led to results as serious as those which were experienced during the accident at Three Mile Island (TMI). The memorandum states that after the steam generators boiled dry during your March 1978 transient, the only reason that flow was reestablished to the steam generators was that a level indication randomly drifted low enough to cause flow from the Auxiliary Feedwater System to automatically actuate. It is hypothesized that the steam generator level indication might not have drifted low, and the results would have been boiling in the core without the benefit of high pressure injection flow and without operator knowledge of system indications.

Although you have responded to our letter of March 6, 1980, providing us with your assessment of the issues surrounding the recent event at the Crystal River Unit No. 3 facility and their applicability to Rancho Seco, the issues raised in the Bernero/Rowsome memorandum appear to transcend those which you were previously asked to address. Therefore, provide comments on the enclosed memorandum paying particular attention to the following:

1. The hypothesis that the March 20, 1978, event at Rancho Seco could have easily degraded to allow results as serious as those experienced at TMI.
2. The safety problems pointed out in Items 1, 2 and 3 on Pages 3 and 4 of the memorandum.

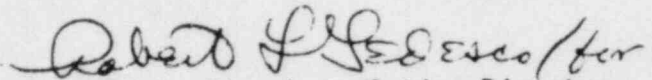
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Mr. J. J. Mattimoe

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You should provide your comments within 30 days of receipt of this letter. If you have any questions related to this letter, please contact your Project Manager, Daniel Garner at 301-492-7435.

Sincerely,



Darrell G. Eisenhut, Acting Director
Division of Operating Reactors
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure:
3/14/80 Memo

cc w/enclosure:
See next page

Sacramento Municipal Utility
District

cc w/enclosure(s):

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