



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

JUL 31 1980

Mr. Guy Richardson
Box 113
Riverside, Arizona 85237

Dear Mr. Richardson:

Your letter to John A. Harris regarding Three Mile Island was referred to me for response. 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 us from responding to you as promptly as we would have liked.

In response to your concern about whether "nuclear power plants are following the rules they should be" and whether other nuclear power plants may have "trouble like this" at Three Mile Island, all nuclear power plants are required to conform to many regulations regarding safety and technical features or NRC does not allow them to be constructed or operated. In addition to these standards, we have taken a number of actions with respect to all nuclear power plants as a result of the Three Mile Island incident. Specifically, full-time inspectors have been assigned to each operating plant utilizing Babcock and Wilcox pressurized water reactors like those at Three Mile Island. In addition, all such plants were shut down and the licensees of each plant were instructed to provide us with additional information about their facilities in light of the Three Mile Island incident. After review of the information provided, orders were issued to the licensees that required them to make immediate plant modifications, to provide additional operator training, and to revise certain operating procedures. Additional long-term actions were ordered to further upgrade certain plant systems, operator training, and procedures. All of these plants, except of course the Three Mile Island plant, have complied with the orders and have been permitted to resume operation.

In addition, licensees of all operating plants utilizing pressurized water reactors have been instructed to take specific actions with regard to the status of certain equipment, plant procedures, operator actions, and facility designs. Licensees of all operating plants, including those utilizing boiling water reactors, have been instructed to provide us with additional information with regard to their facilities in light of the Three Mile Island incident.

We are currently reviewing the information provided. As soon as our review is complete, orders for modifications, as appropriate, will be issued to provide additional protection to the health and safety of the public.

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In addition to the actions outlined above, as a result of TMI-2, studies were initiated in the areas of emergency preparedness, operator licensing reassessment, loss of feedwater event, small-break loss of coolant accidents, and lessons learned from the incident. In a number of areas work has progressed to the point where additional license requirements have been recommended. A number of these recommendations have been approved and efforts have begun to implement them.

You asked whether there are "inspectors watching these plants close enough." The NRC is involved in inspections of nuclear power plants before and after operation begins. In the case of Three Mile Island Unit 2, there were 39 NRC inspections at the plant during 1978. The date of initial criticality (start of a nuclear chain reaction) was March 28, 1978, and the date of commercial operation was December 30, 1978. During that interval, there were some equipment failures, but they were corrected.

In May 1977, the NRC adopted a resident inspection program. The first resident inspectors were assigned to 15 sites during the summer of 1978. At present, there are resident inspectors at about 30 sites. When the program is fully implemented in September 1981, at least as many resident inspectors will be assigned to each site of a nuclear power plant as there are operating power reactors there. All of these resident inspectors will serve a tour of duty at their assigned plant, followed by rotation to another site, a regional office, or NRC headquarters.

With regard to your concern about "waste that comes from these plants," the goal of the U.S. Nuclear Waste Management Program is to provide assurance that existing and future nuclear waste from military and civilian activities, including spent fuel from the once-through nuclear power cycle, can be isolated from the biosphere so as to pose no significant threat to public health and safety and the environment. The NRC is responsible for providing the framework of criteria and regulations that will ensure that the disposal methods developed for all types of radioactive waste are consistent with the achievement of this goal of safe, long-term waste disposal.

The NRC's authority to license and regulate the storage and disposal of radioactive wastes is derived from three statutes: the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. To implement this authority and to provide guidance to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the industry, and the public, the NRC is developing new or revised regulations for such storage and disposal. These regulations will require conformance with a fixed set of minimally acceptable performance standards for waste management activities while providing for flexibility in the technological approach.

DOE's responsibilities concerning radioactive waste disposal are limited to high-level wastes and to only those low-level wastes produced as part of DOE's programs. Their responsibility does not include commercially generated low-level wastes.

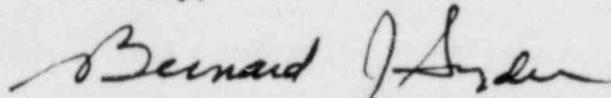
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We appreciate your concerns and assure you that every effort is being made to ensure the continued protection of the health and safety of the public, not only at Three Mile Island, but also at all nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernard J. Snyder". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Bernard J. Snyder, Program Director
Three Mile Island Program Office
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation