



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

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JUL 31 1980

Docket No. 50-320

7B Team
Edgewood Middle School
Willoughby Beach Road
Edgewood, Maryland 21040

Dear 7B Team:

I am writing in response to your letter to Commissioner Hendrie concerning the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear facility. I regret that this answer to your letter has been delayed for so long. 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.

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 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.

The principal obligation of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is to see that public health and safety are preserved by the nuclear power industry. The Commission has the power to regulate the industry by granting construction and operating licenses. It can also order plants to shut down if they do not meet safety standards.

Regarding your question about the shutdown of all nuclear plants, it should be noted that some 13% of the electricity produced in the United States comes from nuclear plants and that in some areas as much as 50% comes from a nuclear source. If all these nuclear plants were shut down, a large number of people would be without electricity unless alternative ways of generating electricity could be quickly put to work, replacing the loss.

NRC considers alternative methods of electricity production, such as solar, wind, and geothermal, in its assessment of the environmental impact of each nuclear power plant as part of its overall review of each utility's application for a construction permit or an operating license. To date, it has been determined that alternative methods of electricity production are neither technically nor economically feasible to provide the required amount of electricity at the time it is needed.

We have taken a number of actions with respect to all nuclear power plants as a result of the accident at Three Mile Island. Specifically, full-time inspectors have been assigned to each operating plant utilizing Babcock & Wilcox pressurized water reactors like those at Three Mile Island. In addition, all these plants were shut down and the licensees of each plant were instructed to provide us with

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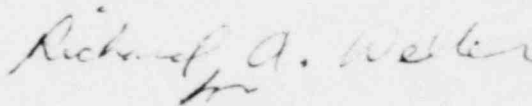
JUL 31 1980

additional information about their facilities in light of the accident. 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 reverse certain operating procedures. Additional long-term actions were ordered to further upgrade certain plant systems and 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.

Two other nuclear plants have had malfunctions similar to the one that caused the accident at Three Mile Island. However, at these other plants, the operators recognized the problem and took the correct preventive measures.

I am enclosing for your further information a publication that describes the organization and functions of the NRC and lists the nuclear power plants in the United States (Appendix 6). I hope this information will be useful to you.

Sincerely,



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

Enclosure:
NRC Annual Report for 1979