



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

COMMISSION
CORRESPONDENCE

August 18, 1980

Mrs. Leona Cook
204 Chesterfield Court
Midland, Michigan 48640

Dear Mrs. Cook:

I was pleased to hear from you. Again you have raised important concerns that deserve attention. While many of the unique problems and handicaps of establishing the resident inspectors program were recognized when the program was being planned, many were not and some probably still are not yet evident. Therefore, identification of problems and suggestions from you and others involved in the Resident Inspection Program continue to be helpful in improving it.

I was glad that Region III had conducted a seminar for resident inspector spouses in concert with a meeting of all Region III resident inspectors. I understand that many concerns were raised and a number of worthwhile suggestions were made. We want to keep the inspector and his or her family informed about the resident program, and we want to hear about their concerns and problems encountered. I know that we cannot guarantee a satisfactory answer to each issue raised, but we will try.

The Commission places a high priority on the Resident Inspection Program and will take every reasonable step to reduce the personal hardships associated with it. Since I last wrote to you in December, NRC has made some progress toward reducing the hardships. Based on a survey of unreimbursed relocation expenses experienced by 26 resident inspectors who have relocated their families, the Commission has decided to ask Congressional approval to increase the amount of reimbursement for relocation. The Commission has also decided, as a matter of policy, that being a resident inspector will be an advantage in getting promotions. We are also examining potential monetary rewards to individuals while they are resident inspectors.

Enclosed are my responses to the specific issues you have raised.

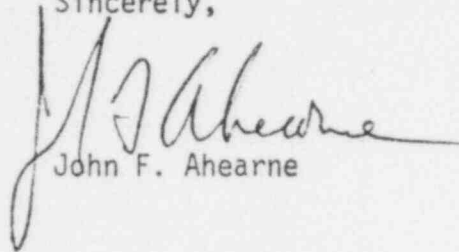
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Mrs. Leona Cook

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In closing, let me say that I value the thought and time that you have taken in bringing me up to date on your experiences, which likely have been faced by other resident inspectors and their families. Although these matters are far from resolved, the Commission is sensitive to the concerns of inspectors and their families, partially as a result of you and others who have shared their insights with us. I will continue to take whatever actions I can to minimize such personal problems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. F. Ahearne". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John F. Ahearne

Enclosure:
As stated

RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC CONCERNS

1. Minor Issues Become Major Problems

You raised the issue of the problem that distance makes, in resolving administrative concerns. Communications are improved when you can see the other individual and both can review the same document simultaneously. This difficulty is particularly present in a relocation, such as those for most resident inspectors, where the new locale is distant, both from the Headquarters personnel who are most involved with the paperwork preparation and processing and from the Regional staff responsible for the resident inspectors' technical responsibilities and performance and for administrative support. However, distance does not justify inadequate and untimely administrative support. Therefore, on July 11 I directed the Executive Director for Operations (EDO) to give the same high priority to providing administrative support as we have to placing inspectors at the sites. However, to make use of that priority, the inspectors must insure their paperwork is submitted quickly.

2. Inability to Take Advantage of NRC Group-Related Benefits

You noted the "inability to take advantage of NRC group related benefits." In some cases, only time and experience can establish appropriate arrangements, similar to those developed for regional office-based employees and their families. Some services, such as blood bank or CPR certification, may not be transferable and, unfortunately, resident employees will have to find alternative means for meeting their needs in these areas.

I am particularly concerned that resident inspectors have the resources to perform their inspection functions. Specialized equipment will require more planning to assure supply and resupply. While there may be practical limits to the supply of reference materials, the NRC staff is in the process of identifying funds necessary to provide appropriate standards and codes and to supply or circulate other reference texts to each resident office.

With respect to transportation expenses, NRC employees are entitled to reimbursement for official use of a private vehicle. This reimbursement, while based on mileage, does include an allowance for wear and depreciation. Employees are responsible for submitting the appropriate paperwork for both local transportation and for long-distance trips associated with approved official business. Therefore when your husband incurs official business expenses, they should be submitted for reimbursement.

3. Attacks on Resident Inspector's Integrity

You expressed concerns about "attacks on the integrity of the resident inspector." I am sure you understand that when allegations are made, they must be investigated. Our investigation of allegations against your husband has shown that there is no substance to them; his record is clear. We have complete confidence in his ability and his integrity. I have requested the EDO to work with the Offices of Public Affairs and Inspector and Auditor and the resident inspectors, to improve the approach and procedures for timely NRC addressal of future allegations.

4. Monetary Concerns

I am troubled about the financial costs of relocation and of serving at a remote assignment. The NRC staff has developed ideas for relief and is now working on legislative language and support documentation. The staff is also investigating additional possibilities that may possibly be implemented by administrative decision without the need for legislation. I expect NRC management to use discretion in approving leave for those employees involved in moving from one community and becoming established in another. However, the employee must request leave and understand the limits.

A separable issue is the on-call status of NRC's resident inspectors. By the very nature of the position, the resident must be on-call. He is the agency representative and must be able to be reached in an emergency.

5. Communications Gap and Obscurity of Position

The last two issues you raised deal with the "communications gap" between the resident inspector and his or her regional supervision and concerns of being "relegated to an obscure position." The resident inspector is the "eyes and ears" of NRC's prime function-- to assure public health and safety. Because of distance, most communications must be by telephone, whether it is daily contact with regional supervisors or weekly contact with the licensing project manager. Beyond that, regions hold resident inspector meetings every few months and regional supervisors are expected to visit the site on a similar frequency. The NRC staff is actively working on various projects to help assuage feelings of isolation. This includes improved telephone communications, a newsletter, and better, more timely information about the NRC, the licensee, and the nuclear energy world.

We realize the position involves some disadvantages but it is one whose primary values are positive. Being a resident inspector provides opportunities, challenges and potential rewards that should attract highly qualified and ambitious technical personnel. As to advancement, we believe that the requirements for selection of resident inspectors and the unique experience they gain, both with respect to nuclear plant design, construction and operation, and in representing the NRC to the licensee and the community, provide positive factors that should more than offset the negative aspects related to location. Also, the position should develop so that it may be attractive as a career in itself. Management positions are limited in the agency--not all employees can become managers. (Nor do all employees want to accept the burdens associated with a management position.) However, we are committed to making the resident inspector position attractive for career development. To this end, the Commission in its March 1980 report to Congress on the Resident Inspection Program stated that being a resident inspector will be an advantage in reaching higher levels within the NRC.