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Department of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20461

Mr. Thomas M. Novak
Director for Operating Reactors
Division of Licensing
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Novak:

This is in response to your recent letter requesting the Economic Regulatory Administration (ERA) to confirm the critical power supply situation outlined by Georgia Power Company in their request for an extension of the deadline for performance of IE Bulletin 80-17 Action Item 2 scram tests at Hatch nuclear plant. The following analysis is based on daily power system status surveys conducted by ERA's Atlanta Field Office during the recent heat wave, and other ERA data on Southern Company System operations, including that information reported to ERA's Electric Power Monitoring Center (EPMC).

Georgia Power Company is one of the four operating utilities of the Southern Company. The other three are Alabama Power Company, Gulf Power Company and Mississippi Power Company. These companies are operated in such a manner as to supply the total load with the most efficient combination of generating units. Therefore, the data collected by ERA reflects the situation for the entire Southern Company System.

The extremely hot weather that has affected large areas of the south and mid-west, has caused very high loads on the Southern Company System. These high loads, coupled with the loss of some of the areas's major generating units, left the Southern Company system with less reserve than their operating criteria required. As a result, emergency sales of electricity to other areas affected by the heat wave were discontinued. Also, as a precautionary measure, some contractually interruptible industrial load was dropped and appeals were made to the public to reduce energy consumption as much as possible.

These actions allowed Southern Company to avoid having to take any mandatory actions to reduce loads, such as voltage reductions or curtailments of firm customer's load.

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Power supply adequacy on the Southern Company system was quite marginal during the heat wave period, and a new period of hot weather will likely cause loads to equal or exceed earlier levels. The removal of a Hatch unit under these conditions would place the system in an operating mode that could not assure adequate and reliable levels of power supply for firm customer loads. When the heat wave abates sufficiently, or when a significant amount of coal-fired capacity returns to service, the removal of a Hatch unit during a weekday could be accomplished without unduly reducing system reliability.

Weekend periods usually offer some load relief even during hot periods, therefore, the required tests could likely be done over such a period, provided this is coordinated with the neighboring utilities. Since the surrounding utilities are also experiencing less than desirable power supply adequacy, Southern Company cannot rely on being able to receive much help if there is not adequate generating capacity on their own system.

This analysis deals only with electric power system reliability and energy supply. I would appreciate being notified of your decision in this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Weiner

Richard E. Weiner
Director, Division of
Power Supply & Reliability
Economic Regulatory Administration