

REGULATORY DOCKET FILE COPY

OCT 15 1980

The Honorable Tom Corcoran
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congressman Corcoran:

This is in response to your September 29, 1980 letter which expressed concern about the "delays and confusion" associated with the regulatory action being taken relative to the proposed chemical decontamination of Commonwealth Edison's Dresden Nuclear Power Station Unit 1. You enclosed a copy of a letter from James J. O'Connor, Chairman and President of Commonwealth Edison, which identified the issuance of a draft environmental impact statement instead of an environmental impact assessment as a major contributor to delay.

The NRC staff has been closely following Commonwealth Edison's effort for the decontamination of Dresden 1 since 1974. In 1975, NRC issued an authorization with three conditions that permitted construction of the decontamination waste treatment facility. Since then, we have been evaluating the safety and environmental aspects of the decontamination and associated waste disposal. In 1975 when NRC gave its initial authorization, Commonwealth Edison tentatively scheduled the actual decontamination activities to start in early 1977. After completion of the decontamination activities, as well as other unrelated changes necessary to meet our requirements for emergency core cooling systems, return to service was anticipated by mid-1977. However, this schedule was not met. The construction of the waste treatment facility was delayed by a shortage of craft labor in the Dresden area. In addition, delays also occurred on the ECCS modifications and since the reactor could not be returned to operation until these related projects were completed, the priority given to decontamination was reduced with a resulting slip in schedule. Pending the completion of the on-site construction and the staff review of information submitted by the licensee to resolve the conditions associated with our 1975 approval, the NRC staff was completing the evaluations needed for approving the actual decontamination process scheduled for May 1980.

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In 1979, an environmental review was completed which reevaluated the environmental impact of the proposed decontamination. This review addressed concerns raised since the initial staff evaluation in 1975. Later, in March 1980, the Commission decided to prepare an environmental impact statement for the replacement of the steam generators at the Surry 1 Nuclear Power Station; this was based in part on the estimated occupational exposure associated with the replacement activities. This Commission decision implied that the expected radiation exposure of workers to be involved in the Dresden 1 decontamination may be such that the Commission would expect an environmental impact statement (EIS) to be prepared by the staff prior to authorizing this work. In addition, there were approximately 150 comments by interested members of the public concerning the decontamination effort and many requested that an EIS be prepared. Accordingly, the Director, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation decided that an EIS on the Dresden decontamination should be prepared for public comment. A draft EIS was issued on May 30, 1980 and thirty comments were received, in addition to the comments from Commonwealth Edison. These comments have been reviewed by the staff and a final EIS is scheduled for issuance this month. Decontamination activities could be authorized thirty days after notice in the Federal Register of the availability of the Final EIS. However, requests for a public hearing on this matter have been made by a number of persons and are now pending before the Commission. Should such a hearing be granted, several additional months may be added to the NRC approval process. Preparation of this Statement will have added about six months in the review/construction process that has already taken about five years to complete.

In the spring of 1980, Commonwealth Edison informed the NRC Project Manager that the design modifications to Dresden 1, other than those required for decontamination, were being further delayed because of revenue problems the Company was facing. By August 1980, Commonwealth Edison had concluded that the need to spend large amounts of money to complete construction of the LaSalle and Byron nuclear stations required that they delay capital spending on design modifications on Dresden 1 until after 1985. Thus, the earliest start date for reactor operation now is beyond 1985 and the need for rapid completion of the decontamination has been further reduced. While we are aware of the increased costs as a result of the additional time needed by NRC to complete the EIS on decontamination of Dresden 1, this additional time is small when compared to the overall time delay that had occurred before the decision was made to prepare the EIS.

The Commission's Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS) is very interested in the general subject of decontamination. As you mentioned, an ACRS Subcommittee had a meeting scheduled for October 8, 1980. The agenda for this meeting includes broad subjects related to decontamination and waste disposal, in general, as well as topics specific to Dresden 1. This meeting is not expected to impact the schedule discussed above for authorizing approval of the decontamination activities at Dresden 1.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us.

Sincerely,

(Signed) E. Kevin Cornell

for William J. Dircks
Executive Director for Operations

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Incoming: Rep. Tom Corcoran

From: _____

To: William Dircks, EDO Date 9/29/80

Subject: Requests comment on Commonwealth Edison letter on NRC delays impairing their financial ability to return Dresden to service

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