

50-29
AUG 8 1974

Honorable Francis W. Sargent
Governor of Massachusetts
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Governor Sargent:

I understand from recent newspaper reports that Mr. Ralph Nader has written to you concerning the safety of a nuclear plant which the AEC has licensed to operate in the State of Massachusetts - Yankee Atomic Electric Company's Yankee Rowe Nuclear Plant in Franklin County.

Apparently, Mr. Nader has misunderstood or misused information about reactor pressure vessels contained in reports issued by the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS) and the AEC Regulatory staff, and in correspondence with Mr. Nader from the Chairman of the ACRS, Dr. William R. Stratton, and the Director of Regulation, Mr. L. M. Muntzing. Copies of these documents and correspondence are enclosed for your reference. The ACRS and the Regulatory staff reports deal primarily with reactor vessels designed and fabricated in accordance with today's nuclear pressure vessel codes. Mr. Muntzing's May 2 letter discussed ten early generation vessels that were designed and constructed to pressure vessel codes in effect during the period of manufacture, and that are still continuing to operate safely in nuclear power plants.

These earlier pressure vessel codes contained rules that reflected the satisfactory experience with vessels in numerous fossil-fueled power plants throughout the United States. In fact, the construction of the earlier vessels was guided also by nuclear standards and codes developed by and used in the Naval reactors program. Older reactor vessels, such as the one at Yankee Rowe, are not less safe to operate than the vessels built to today's codes. The current nuclear pressure vessel codes merely reflect requirements that include advances in the pressure vessel technology since the period of manufacture of the earlier reactor vessels.

Both the ACRS and the Regulatory staff reports conclude that the probability of a disruptive failure of any reactor pressure vessel is exceedingly small. In fact, recent tests supported by the AEC have

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demonstrated that vessels which were deliberately flawed withstood pressures almost twice as great as they are designed to sustain in operation. Nevertheless, as a matter of conservative Regulatory practice, the staff requires that all reactor pressure vessels, including the one at Yankee Rowe, be subject to stringent inspection, surveillance and testing programs. The conduct and results of these programs are carefully monitored and evaluated by the Regulatory staff. Despite this, I understand that Mr. Nader has suggested to you that such programs do not exist and that you should take appropriate action.

If it would be helpful, I would be pleased to have appropriate members of the Regulatory staff discuss this matter with you and/or members of your staff. In the meantime, please let me know if I can provide you with additional information about the AEC's Regulatory responsibilities for protecting the public health and safety.

Sincerely,

Original signed by
Dixy Lee Ray

Chairman

Enclosures:

1. Rpt to AEC fm ACRS dtd January 14, 1974, WASH-1285
2. Ltr fm ACRS, Stratton to Nader dtd March 13, 1974
3. Ltr fm AEC, Muntzing to Nader dtd May 2, 1974
4. Technical Report by AEC Reg. Staff dtd May 1974, WASH-1318

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cc w/encls:

Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Senator Edward W. Brooke
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bcc: See attached list

*mailed
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4 p.m.*

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