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Mr. Dan R. Harkey
6610 McKenzie Highway
Springfield, Oregon 97477

Dear Mr. Harkey:

I am writing in response to your questions to Commissioner Hendrie of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding Three Mile Island. I regret that this answer to your letter has been delayed. 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.

With regard to your questions and concerns about nuclear waste, the goal of the U.S. Nuclear Waste Management Program is to provide assurance that existing and future nuclear waste from military and civilian activities, including spent fuel from the once-through nuclear power cycle, can be isolated from the biosphere so as to pose no significant threat to public health and safety and the environment. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is responsible for providing the framework of criteria and regulations that will ensure that the disposal methods developed for all types of radioactive waste are consistent with the achievement of this goal of safe, long-term waste disposal.

The NRC's authority to license and regulate the storage and disposal of radioactive wastes is derived from three statutes: the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. To implement this authority and to provide guidance to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the industry, and the public, the NRC is developing new or revised regulations for such storage and disposal. These regulations will require conformance with a fixed set of minimally acceptable performance standards for waste management activities while providing for flexibility in the technological approach.

The DOE's responsibilities concerning radioactive waste disposal are limited to high-level wastes and to only those low-level wastes produced as part of DOE's programs. Their responsibility does not include commercially generated low-level wastes.

You ask how many plants are being built from plans like those used to construct the reactors at Three Mile Island. At present, 15 units under construction and seven in operation use this design. They are in addition to the two units at Three Mile Island.

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Mr. Dan R. Harkey

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Your question about what went wrong at TMI is answered in "A Report to the Commissioners and to the Public on Three Mile Island," a copy of which is enclosed.

You requested a list of nuclear energy pros and cons. 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 pros and cons of this energy source should be directed to that agency.

With regard to your question about inspectors at nuclear power plants, in May 1977, the NRC adopted a resident inspection program. The first resident inspectors were assigned to 15 sites during the summer of 1978. At present, there are resident inspectors at about 80 sites, with one or more resident inspectors at each of 58 sites with an operating or preoperational reactor and 1 inspector at each of 19 sites with a reactor in construction.

Related activities currently under way by the NRC include the expansion of the resident inspection program at all construction sites, the development of an equipment qualification program and a trial program to independently test a sampling of nuclear components utilizing principally nondestructive test methods.

We assure you that every effort is being made to ensure the continued protection of the public health and safety at all nuclear power plants that are currently operating or that may begin operation in the future.

Sincerely,

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

Enclosure:
Report to the Commissioners

OFFICE	TMIPD	TMIPD	DIR TMIPD
SURNAME	Maurican/hmt	DBrinkman	BJ Snyder
DATE	10/3/80	10/3/80	10/4/80