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November 12, 1980



Honorable John F. Ahearne  
Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, DC 20555

DOCKET NUMBER 50-289  
PROD. & UTIL. SEC.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As expressed in our report accompanying the DOE and NRC FY 1980 supplemental appropriations Act, our Committee is concerned by the slow rate that decisions are being made concerning the cleanup of the Three Mile Island (TMI) accident site. General Public Utilities (GPU) announced recently that they are cutting back cleanup operations to "about 50 percent of the present level of activities". The company stated that these "reductions in the cleanup operation at TMI are primarily related to the pace at which the company obtains regulatory approval from the NRC."

According to the cleanup plans published by the NRC concerning the TMI accident, the next major step is to clean up the radioactive water in the containment building. GPU has stated that it can be ready to start doing this by the end of this year. However, a recent report to the Committee from the Department of Energy (DOE) expresses concern that the NRC will not act on the approval of the proposed system in a timely manner. The DOE states:

". . . A delay in removing the contaminated water from the containment building would also delay access to the damaged core and the establishment of full control of the reactor systems. Such a delay would not be prudent for protecting the health and safety of the public. . .

"Specifically, we believe the utility could [proceed] to decontaminate the water in the containment building and then store the radioactive resins (as spent fuel is being stored) until the disposal question is resolved adequately to permit further processing of the contaminated resins. An environmental

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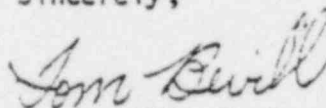
assessment of the SDS operation (similar to that done for EPICOR and the krypton purging) would form the basis for this decision, and would be completely consistent with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Thus, cleanup of the water could proceed when the SDS is completed at the end of 1980 and not await the completion of a full generic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) being prepared by NRC to address other issues."

I would appreciate an early response to the following questions:

1. When do you expect GPU to be ready to start the water cleanup operation?
2. When do you expect the NRC will be ready to authorize GPU to start this operation?
3. Taking into consideration the studies made by DOE, NRC and GPU that led to the design of the proposed system for this cleanup operation, the analyses of alternatives reported in the draft environmental impact statement, and the present status of system construction, has the NRC identified any course of action that would be preferable to getting this system into operation as quickly as possible?
4. If the NRC decided to proceed with cleanup as proposed by the DOE, when could NRC be ready to authorize GPU to start this operation?
5. What other steps could NRC take to speed up the TMI cleanup operations?
6. Is any other federal agency, such as DOE, EPA or CEQ, etc., delaying NRC from taking the steps necessary to assure that the cleanup proceeds in a safe manner as quickly as possible? If so, please be specific as to the agency and the decisions involved.

I believe that this matter is of utmost importance in establishing whether, under present regulatory arrangements, this Nation has the capacity to deal with nuclear power issues. The President has stated that we must continue to rely on nuclear energy and I am concerned that NRC action, or failure to act in a timely manner, could seriously undermine our ability to use nuclear energy in a safe and acceptable manner. I would appreciate your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Tom Bevill, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Energy  
and Water Development