



Citizens Within the Ten Mile Radius

Post Office Box 382, Amesbury, Massachusetts 01913

January 8, 1993

Ivan Selin, Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Chairman Selin,

We write today to express our serious concern over the response of Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff to a recent incident at the Seabrook reactor. In light of your expressed commitment to public safety and more consistent regulation, we believe that you will want to investigate this matter.

On Monday, January 4 of this year, Seabrook Station was shut down by reactor operators in response to a number of equipment failures that was initiated by the mechanical failure of a water heater relief valve. This appears to have been the prudent response of operators to a condition that may have led to the release of nuclides into the general environment. We applaud the actions of operators who exercise conservative judgments to minimize the potential adverse impacts of reactor operations.

We were outraged, therefore, by the public statement of NRC Inspector Richard Laura to the regional press on January 5. Mr. Laura admonished reactor operators for their prompt response and suggested that the reactor need not have been tripped. He said, in effect, that operators should have run the reactor until it broke down and tripped itself, ignoring the potential consequence to those who live close to the reactor.

This response by the NRC Inspector raises a number of questions:

First, without a complete investigation of this incident, how could Mr. Laura conclude that the operator was in error? The obvious answer is that he had little on which to base such a judgment, and he was performing a public relations function that exceeds the scope of his responsibilities.

Second, is it not the function of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to regulate the operation of reactors in order to protect public health and safety? If so, Mr. Laura has assumed the additional responsibility of protecting the economic interests of consumers, which is not his mission. The Public Utilities Commission of New Hampshire is charged with the responsibility of ensuring an adequate supply of power to its state at a reasonable cost. This is not the function of the NRC.

AMESBURY • MILFORD • NEWBURY • NEWBURYPORT • SALISBURY • WEST NEWBURY • AND BLYNDEN

9303040314 930228
PDR ADOCK 05000443
PDR
5

Third, does the NRC desire regulated utilities to take imprudent risks in the course of normal operations? Inspector Laura gave an unmistakable message to reactor operators at Seabrook. By his public criticism of the operators, he has increased the likelihood that they will be less conservative of public health and safety, fearing public scrutiny of their actions when they should be making considered judgments based on available data and their professional judgment.

We understand that operators are run by people who sometimes make mistakes. Being human, we all err. But errors made in caution are far preferable to those made by carelessness. The comments by Inspector Laura only reinforce the notion that Seabrook and other reactors should be operated in less diligent fashion than your public statements have indicated.

Simply stated, Inspector Laura's actions call to question the commitment of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to protecting public health and safety. His response to the incident of January 4 was reckless and potentially deadly. We demand that the NRC take immediate disciplinary action.

Thank you for your prompt response to this matter. We await your reply.

Sincerely,



Sandra Gavutis
For the Directors,
Citizens Within the Ten Mile Radius

cc: Honorable Albert Gore
Honorable Edward Kennedy
Honorable John Kerry
Honorable Peter Torkildsen

New England News Briefs

Globe

Time 1/5/93

Seabrook blame levied on 2 fronts

Regulatory officials at the Seabrook nuclear power plant said yesterday equipment malfunction was the cause of a reactor shutdown Sunday morning, but that proper action by the operators might have kept the plant on line. Richard Laura, an on-site inspector with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said that the actions of operators were under review yesterday. A leaky relief valve on a water heater started a chain reaction that led to the decision by plant operators to shut the reactor down, Laura said. But he added, "It appears the problem could have been isolated without tripping the reactor. That is what is still under review by the plant's owners and the NRC."