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Docket 50-289
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BSnyder
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OCT 10 1980

Ms. Patrice Cianciosi
41 Jackson Avenue
Endicott, New York 13750

Dear Ms. Cianciosi:

Your letter to Mr. Denton about the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear station was referred to me for response. I regret that this answer 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.

The Commission has ordered that a public hearing be conducted to determine whether TMI-1 should be operated and, if so, under what conditions the restart would take place. Prior to start of the hearings, the NRC staff will conduct a review of technical information concerning the restart of Unit 1. As part of this review, the NRC staff will conduct meetings with the licensee in the presence of the public, and the public will be given the opportunity to raise questions and to make statements. During the hearing, the technical issues that are appropriate to assure the public health and safety will all be addressed. In addition, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board has indicated that NRC should consider the psychological impact of future operation on the nearby communities. A copy of the Commission Order that outlines the issues to be considered is enclosed for your information.

As for Unit 2, the licensee has not yet submitted to the NRC a proposal for overall plant recovery, although the licensee is conducting feasibility studies. It is not possible at this time to determine when such proposals for recovery may be submitted or how much time will be needed for the required reviews and approvals in connection with Unit 2's recovery. I would note, however, that the licensee's authority to operate Unit 2, except for those actions necessary to keep the reactor shut down, was suspended by Order of July 20, 1979.

With regard to your concern about the release of contaminated water, except for releases to the Susquehanna River of liquids containing only low or nondetectable levels of radioactivity, such releases are not currently permitted. The Commission authorized use of the EPICOR-II water treatment system for processing the waste water stored in tanks in the auxiliary building. We do not currently permit the discharge of water processed by the EPICOR-II system. The disposal of the water processed by EPICOR-II is addressed in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on the decontamination and disposal of radioactive waste at Three Mile Island. Enclosed for your information is a copy of the PEIS.

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As a result of releases containing only low or nondetectable levels of radioactivity, the levels of radioactivity in the Susquehanna are indistinguishable from existing background levels at public water supply intakes from the river. These levels have been confirmed by independent measurements made by the NRC, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A team of investigators from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare calculated the doses to the people living within 50 miles of the Three Mile Island site and estimated the number of new cancers that would result from the exposure to the radioactivity that leaked out of the plant. The team reported their work in a report entitled, "Population Dose and Health Impact of the Accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Station" (NUREG-0558). They concluded that the offsite collective dose associated with radioactive material released from March 28, 1979, to April 7, 1979, represents minimal risks (that is, a very small number of additional health effects to the offsite population). Also enclosed for your information is the summary of NUREG-0558.

Regarding your comments that NRC should phase out nuclear power plants, NRC's primary responsibility consists in the licensing, inspection, and enforcement of regulations for nuclear power plants in the interest of public health and safety and for the protection of the environment. Changes in NRC's regulatory responsibilities can stem from the public's will and the resulting Congressional action.

I appreciate your concerns and assure you that every effort is being made to ensure the continued protection of the health and safety of the public, not only at Three Mile Island, but also at all nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,

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

- Enclosures: 1. Order and Notice of Hearing of August 9, 1979
- 2. PEIS
- 3. Summary of NUREG-0558

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