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Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance

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November 27, 1980

John Ahearne, Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Chairman Ahearne:

We are writing to you about a matter of grave concern and urgency. The Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Vernon has been shutdown since September 27 for refueling and scheduled repairs. During the past two months, a number of serious and unexpected problems have surfaced at the facility. The plant was scheduled to resume operations on November 29 but these additional discoveries have forced further delays. We believe that there will be a real and imminent threat to human life if Vermont Yankee reopens.

Enclosed is a copy of a letter that we mailed this week to Vermont public officials calling for "a full and public investigation into the operation and safety of Vermont Yankee." We have also contacted our congressional delegation for the purpose of involving them in working in our behalf in this serious matter.

We ask that you launch such an investigation immediately in cooperation with the state of Vermont and citizens groups and that you organize public hearings. Naturally, we fully expect that the plant will remain closed for the duration of the investigation.

A delegation of our membership intends to visit you and your staff next week in Washington. We will contact your office to arrange a meeting time.

We must all work together in a prompt and open manner to forestall the irrevocable threat that Vermont Yankee poses to our beautiful region.

Virginia Callan
Vermont Yankee
Decommissioning Alliance
Montpelier, Vt. 05602
(802) 223-2695

Sincerely,

Cort Richardson
Vermont Yankee
Decommissioning Alliance
Brattleboro, Vt. 05301
(802) 257-0072

Handwritten initials: H 10/27/80

cc. William Dirks, Director
Safety and Safeguards Division
Nuclear Regulatory Commission

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November 25, 1980

Honorable Richard A. Snelling
State of Vermont, State House
Montpelier, VT 05602

Honorable Richard Saudek, Chairman
Vermont Public Service Board
Vermont State Nuclear Advisory Panel
Montpelier, VT 05602

Honorable Brendan J. Whitaker, Secretary
Agency of Environmental Conservation
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Sirs:



Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance

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Vermont lies in one of the most beautiful regions of our country. The State government has enjoyed a long standing reputation of concern for the health of its citizens and for protection of its invaluable natural resources. We know that you share these concerns and that you will act in this tradition on the following matter.

This is a request for a full and public investigation into the operation of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant. Recent disclosures about new problems at the facility give us great reason for concern. An independent, sufficiently funded investigation into the safety and management of Vermont Yankee is in the public interest.

We petition you and your respective agencies to exercise your authority to organize such an investigation on the behalf of thousands of our supporters in this state, and throughout the area adjacent to the plant. We request, also, that public hearings be held on this important matter. We ask that you seek the full cooperation and participation of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as well as independent experts in this effort. Most importantly, you should use the emergency powers available to you to ensure that the plant will remain closed during this process.

On September 27, Vermont Yankee shutdown for maintenance, repairs, and refueling. The plant was scheduled to re-open on November 29. Instead, a number of new problems have surfaced which require repairs or replacement. These discoveries have delayed the re-opening of the plant for an undetermined period of time.

Cracks and corrosion have been discovered in components of the plant's water cleanup system including a sixty foot section of the very important reactor water discharge pipe. It is not clear what caused this unexpected fatigue in such a critical area of the plant. This is very serious. Potentially, such insufficient protection in an important section of the primary cooling system could cause a loss of coolant in the reactor resulting in immediate danger to the public. This situation should be a central part of the investigation into plant management and safety.

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The facility's turbine generator also showed signs of significant wear and will require repairs. A turbine at the Yankee Atomic Plant in Rowe, Massachusetts in similar condition caused that plant to be closed for most of this past year when it literally fell apart during an attempted start-up. Apparently the corrosion and stress sustained by these systems combined with possibly poor design and workmanship have contributed to accelerated decay and unreliability.

The Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation is currently seeking to recover their expense: from the costly replacement of defective bolts in the piping support system resulting from their original and possibly fraudulent installation. Can we reasonably assume that Vermont Yankee can be reopened when the bolt issue represents the latest in a history of improper operation, unexpected repairs, and unscheduled and extended shutdowns?

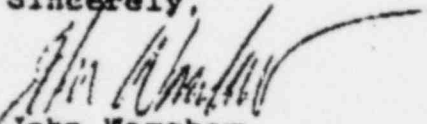
The history of the Dry Well Torus emergency containment system currently under repair at Yankee, is one of repeated and costly failures in repair attempts, resulting in years of operation without the full benefit of this critical safety system. The fact that there have been repeated leaks in the plant's cooling systems has added to the danger of a life-threatening accident because the torus was designed to back-up those systems in the event of a major loss of coolant accident.

Vermont Yankee is the only plant in the country that refuses to install an inerting system, even though the N.R.C. has advised them to install one. This safety unit would forestall a hydrogen explosion that would breach the reactor containment in the event of an accident.

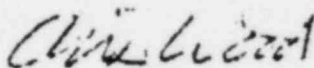
The plant has been allowed to operate since last June without any further action from Vermont's Water Resources Board on the company's application to renew its water discharge permit. At a public hearing that was held in Brattleboro that month, many questions and objections were raised and the permit was held back for additional study. Unfortunately, the plant has operated since that time under the old permit even though it did not comply with the terms of its contract with the state.

These events cannot be ignored. There is a serious and immediate danger to the people of our region if Vermont Yankee reopens without a thorough investigation. It is our belief that these aforementioned problems constitute the most extreme and immediate threat to public safety that Vermont Yankee has ever posed.

Sincerely,



John Warshaw
Central Vermont
Safe Energy Coalition



Chris Wood
Vermont Yankee Decom-
missioning Alliance