

PDR



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555

January 28, 1994

CHAIRMAN

The Honorable John Dingell, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During your Subcommittee's March 3, 1993 hearing on the use of Thermo-Lag fire barriers in nuclear power plants, the Commission testified on the status of NRC's efforts to resolve concerns about the barriers. Subsequently, members of the NRC staff have discussed these continuing efforts with your staff on several occasions, most recently on November 30, 1993. I am writing at this time to inform you of recent developments affecting resolution of the remaining issues.

In briefings on Thermo-Lag issues by the NRC staff on October 29, 1993, and by NUMARC on November 24, 1993, the Commission expressed concern that the NUMARC test program alone may not facilitate resolution of the issues. The Commission asked the NRC staff to consider alternatives to the NRC's action plan in the event the test program should prove not to be sufficient to reach an acceptable solution. In response to this request, the staff reconsidered the safety significance of the issues and assessed several alternatives to the current action plan. The staff concluded that continued use of compensatory measures, such as fire watches, will ensure adequate fire safety until resolution is achieved. The staff also concluded that the action plan, with some adjustments, will help ensure expeditious resolution of the remaining issues.

NRC's original action plan was based on industry completing the NUMARC test program, applying the test results to existing in-plant fire barriers, and implementing plant-specific resolution plans for unique fire barrier configurations. This plan assumed that generic Thermo-Lag upgrades could be promptly developed for existing in-plant barriers. However, based on the results of preliminary tests and the scope of the NUMARC test program, it now appears that developing generic upgrades for all barrier configurations may not be possible. Therefore, some licensees relying on NUMARC's program may need to take actions above and beyond the NUMARC program to address concerns about their barriers. This has complicated the resolution and has extended the completion schedule originally targeted by the NRC staff. It also appears that some licensees may not have evaluated the applicability of the NUMARC program to their plant designs. Failure to do so now could further delay completion of the action plan.

To help ensure that an acceptable solution is clearly defined in a reasonable amount of time, the staff in December 1993 sent a letter to each licensee relying on the NUMARC test program to request information as a followup to the licensee's original response to Generic Letter (GL) 92-08, "Thermo-Lag 330-1 Fire Barriers." The letter requests information on the configurations of

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Thermo-Lag fire barriers and amount of Thermo-Lag materials installed in the plant, how the NUMARC test results will be applied, how configurations particular to the plant will be addressed, what alternatives are available for configurations that may not demonstrate satisfactory performance by test or cannot be upgraded, and plans and schedules for resolving the issues identified in GL 92-08. The NRC staff will use this information to review the proposed NUMARC guidance for evaluating and upgrading Thermo-Lag fire barriers and to assess the plant-specific plans for resolving the issues. To further improve the timeliness of Thermo-Lag issue resolution, the NRC staff has increased senior management involvement in resolving the remaining issues with NUMARC.

The NRC staff and industry continue to devote significant resources and attention to the resolution of the Thermo-Lag issues. The Commission continues to place high priority on the accurate and timely resolution of the issues associated with the Thermo-Lag fire barrier system and will continue to take all actions necessary to ensure that the public health and safety are protected.

We will continue to keep you informed of our progress in resolving issues related to the use of Thermo-Lag in nuclear power plants.

Sincerely,



Ivan Selin

cc: Rep. Dan Schaefer