



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

March 29, 1994

The Honorable Eric D. Fingerhut
United States House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Fingerhut:

On behalf of the Commission, I am responding to your letter of February 24, 1994, regarding the discharges of slightly contaminated water from the Fermi 2 nuclear plant into Lake Erie. There have been two releases of water associated with a December 25, 1993 turbine accident and fire at the plant. One more release is planned in the next several weeks.

The NRC monitored the first two releases prior to their discharge and confirmed that the concentrations of all radionuclides in the water were small fractions of the 10 CFR Part 20 limits for release to unrestricted areas. For the first discharge, the NRC also monitored the actual discharge at the release point and local intake point (City of Monroe water intake) to verify that the levels remained well within regulatory limits. For all samples, the results indicated less than the minimum detectable activity level for each radionuclide of concern. The staff also calculated expected exposures to the general public from the normal ingestion pathway, such as drinking Monroe city water and eating fish from Lake Erie over the course of a year. In all cases, the expected doses represented very small fractions (less than 0.1 percent) of the equivalent amount of radiation expected annually from naturally occurring background sources.

The utility is authorized in its NRC license to discharge liquids from the plant under carefully monitored and controlled conditions and subject to limits in the license and in NRC regulations. No prior notice to the NRC is required of these releases. However, due to the significant public and news media interest in the turbine accident and its consequences, Detroit Edison Company held a news briefing on the planned water releases on February 15 and issued a written news release the following day. This news release stated that the utility planned to release up to 1.5 million gallons of excess water associated with the December 25 accident. Following this news release, the NRC's Region III Office responded to numerous calls from the news media and from members of the public discussing the planned releases.

Because of the reaction to the utility's public announcement of the releases, the utility agreed to postpone the initial discharge until a public meeting could be held to review the matter. The local governments retained a consultant to review the planned discharges, including sample results, and the consultant presented his findings in the public meeting on February 23, which

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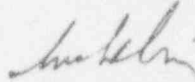
was attended by several hundred persons. Several members of the NRC Region III and headquarters staffs also participated in the meeting to assist in providing information to address public questions concerning the proposed discharge.

In addition to the initial news announcement, Detroit Edison Company also issued a news announcement prior to the second discharge. The level of news media and public interest in the second discharge was substantially less than for the first discharge.

In summary, the NRC has monitored the actual discharges from Fermi to ensure that the discharges met regulatory limits for release and that the public's health and safety are protected. In addition, there were significant efforts on the part of the utility and various government agencies, including the NRC, to provide information on the planned releases. The resulting concerns raised by members of the public, however, underscore the need to continue to provide information on activities at nuclear plants.

We will be pleased to send you a copy of our completed inspection report documenting the results of this and future discharges when published. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Ivan Selin