



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555-0001

April 26, 1994

Backtalk
c/o Ms. Katharine Fong
Managing Editor, Mother Jones
731 Market Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, California 94103

Dear Ms. Fong:

The purpose of this letter is to reply to your letter to Chairman Selin d. April 13, 1994, which forwarded an advance copy of the May/June 1994 edition of Mother Jones magazine. In accordance with your letter, we accept your invitation to respond to the article entitled "Faulty Rods," by Ashley Craddock, and wish that the following appear in your "Backtalk" column:

The article entitled "Faulty Rods," from your May/June 1994 edition, implies that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) takes an unresponsive approach to reviewing alleged safety concerns with products or services supplied to the nuclear industry. This implication is incorrect. The NRC receives numerous allegations and takes each and every one of them very seriously. Each allegation, including the one described in the referenced article, is investigated thoroughly until a conclusion has been made whether the concern can be substantiated and whether the alleged failure could create a substantial safety hazard if it were to occur in nuclear applications. The NRC can and does require corrective action when conditions warrant. The results of the in-depth inspection of Teledyne Wah Chang Albany are documented in NRC inspection report 99901229/91-01 dated November 27, 1991. The NRC concluded that the allegations that improperly heat treated zircaloy 2 fuel tube shells had been supplied to fuel rod manufacturers could not be substantiated based on inspection of corrosion samples and observation of heat treating of zircaloy 2 billets.

Fuel rod failures due to nodular corrosion in operating reactors, particularly boiling water reactors, have been well recognized in the past. This type of corrosion failure is usually associated with plants susceptible to crud induced localized corrosion. However, there is no known or direct link between nodular corrosion and the beta quenching process. Trending information in a recent survey of nuclear industry operating experience by NRC (NUREG/CR-3950 Volume 8, "Fuel Performance Annual Report for 1990," issued November 1993) indicated that the greater percentage of reported fuel rod failures for which the cause has been identified is attributable to debris induced fretting, flow vibrational (grid) fretting, or undetected fabrication defects. There has been no indication that the number

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of fuel rod failures by nodular corrosion has been increasing. Further, the NRC requires licensees to take corrective action for identified fuel rod failures in accordance with the provisions of their license.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the article.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Rossi
Charles E. Rossi, Director
Division of Reactor Inspection
and Licensee Performance
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

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(original signed by)

Charles E. Rossi, Director
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