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March 20, 1990

Director  
Division of Freedom of Information  
and Publications Services  
Office of Administration and Resources Management  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION  
ACT REQUEST

FOIA-90-129  
Rec'd 3-22-90

Re: Freedom of Information request

Dear Sir or Madam:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, I would like copies of the following documents:

--Any reports, memorandums, letters, call memos, memos to the file, meeting transcripts or other documents pertaining to the bond default by the Washington Public Power Supply System in July 1983 (although some may be dated earlier or later). The bonds had been sold to finance two since-abandoned nuclear plants, WPPSS No. 4 and WPPSS No. 5.

--Any reports, memorandums, letters, meeting transcripts, call memos, memos to the file or other documents pertaining to the financial impact of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident of 1979 on the U.S. and foreign nuclear industry, including any assessments of how Wall Street investors or banks viewed the nuclear industry in the years after TMI. The time period of this request would be March 28, 1979, to the present.

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information, I request both representative of the news media status, a category also open to established freelance writers, and a public interest waiver of all search and copying fees. I will now provide the information requested of waiver applicants in 10 CFR 9.41(b)(c) & (d).

(1) Describe the purpose for which the requester intends to use the requested information.

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The documents will be used in preparation of a definitive history of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident and its impact on the world. The form of presentation will be a book.

**(2) Explain the extent to which the requester will extract and analyze the substantive content of the agency record.**

I will provide a great deal of analysis to the information in the documents I obtain from the NRC. I will match it with information I obtain from other sources, such as the documents of other agencies and personal interviews, and use all that information to write a comprehensive, truthful and objective account of what happened during the TMI accident in 1979 and during TMI-related activities in the years that followed.

The NRC documents will provide me with facts, policies and attitudes, some of which may still be unknown to the general public.

**(3) Describe the nature of the specific activity or research in which the agency records will be used and the specific qualifications the requester possesses to utilize information for the intended use in such a way that it will contribute to public understanding.**

I plan to use the NRC records to write a definitive history for the general public of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident of 1979 and its impact on the world. The book will describe the events leading to the accident, the accident itself, and what happened at TMI and to the nuclear industry in the 10 years that followed.

I have considerable experience in making complex scientific or technical stories accessible and interesting to the general public. My first book, *Unseen Danger: A Tragedy of People, Government and the Centralia Mine Fire* (University of Pennsylvania Press 1986), required me to make a complex geological problem understandable to people who were not, in most cases, geologists or scientists.

I covered the nuclear energy beat for an area newspaper for about two years, and acquired a working knowledge of nuclear terminology and procedures. If there was something I did not understand about something I had read, I would call an expert who could help me. I would do the same if there was something I did not understand in the documents I seek in this FOIA request.

My degree is in political science, and my TMI book will be as much about politics as about science. I am fully confident that I will be able to understand the NRC documents I seek and to make the story understandable and interesting to a wide public audience.

**4. Describe the likely impact on the public's understanding of the subject as compared to the level of understanding existing prior to disclosure.**

No comprehensive, definitive history has been written of the TMI accident. Several books were written within three years of the accident. None of them include any of the information learned about the course of the Unit 2 meltdown after 1984, and all approach the TMI accident somewhat narrowly--focusing almost exclusively on the Thornburgh-NRC dealings or what was known then about what was happening inside TMI.

My book will tell all that, although more completely and in better context, but will also go much farther. I will place the accident in the context of the rise and (perhaps) fall of commercial nuclear power in the U.S. and world, looking at public reaction to nuclear power from day one and how it affected the fortunes of the industry.

I intend for my book to be the one people pick up at the library in years to come when they want to know the who-what-why-when-and-where of one of the more significant technical, business and historic events of the late 20th century. It will distill the important information from the tens of thousands of government documents pertaining to TMI issued between 1968 and 1991 (or 1992), technical papers written by scientists, and the many other sources of information into one good book.

**(5) Describe the size and nature of the the public to whose understanding a contribution will be made.**

This book is being written for the general reading public--the average man or woman who does not work for the NRC or the Department of Energy or the nuclear industry and who typically would only receive information about TMI from a book acquired at a library or bookstore. I would estimate this to be quite a large, diverse group.

**(6) Describe the intended means of dissemination to the public.**

A book.

**(7) Indicate if public access to information will be provided free of charge or provided for an access fee or publication fee.**

Readers will be able to borrow the book free of charge at public libraries, or obtain it by purchasing it at a bookstore.

**(8) Describe any commercial or private interest the requester or any other party has in the agency records sought.**

I have no commercial or private interest in the NRC documents sought in this request. They will be used exclusively for research for my book and will not be sold.

**(d)(1) How the subject of the requested agency records concerns the operations or activities of the Government.**

It is the duty of the NRC to regulate the U.S. nuclear industry, and these documents will show the financial impact to the nuclear industry and public that can occur when a breakdown in that regulatory function--as at TMI--occurs.

**(d)(2) How the disclosure of the information is likely to contribute to an understanding of Government operations or activities.**

The documents will be used in a book about the TMI accident and its impact on the world. Readers of the book will come to understand how a breakdown in the regulatory function of the NRC can lead to an accident with severe financial impact to the nuclear industry and to the public at large.

**(d)(3) If disclosure of the requested information is likely to contribute to public understanding.**

To the best of my knowledge, no books have been written about the impact of the TMI accident on the nuclear industry. The documents I requested will show the specific impact of the accident on one utility, the Washington Public Power Supply System, and on the nuclear industry at large.

**(d)(4) If disclosure is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of Government operations or activities.**

The documents will contribute significantly to a general public understanding of the role of the NRC in regulating the nuclear industry and specifically to a public understanding of how a breakdown in the NRC's regulatory function led to severe financial impact on the nuclear industry and the ratepaying public. As I stated before, no books have been written on this subject, to the best of my knowledge.

(d)(5) If, and the extent to which, the requester has a commercial interest that would be furthered by the disclosure of the requested agency records.

I anticipate receiving royalties on the book, perhaps in four or five years. However, there is no guarantee I will make any profit on the book. It is often said that most authors would make more money by spending the same amount of time working in a fast food restaurant. My first book, *Unseen Danger*, received favorable reviews, including in The New York Times, was purchased for many libraries, and earned me enough royalties to buy a nice coat, which I still have. I hope this book will do better, but one can never tell.


(d)(6) If the magnitude of the identified commercial interest of the requester is sufficiently large, in comparison with the public interest in disclosure, that disclosure is primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

As I have stated, the documents will be used in a definitive history of the TMI accident and its impact on the world. I anticipate receiving royalties, but I believe the public interest in disclosure of the documents clearly outweighs any minimal commercial benefit to myself.

One of the areas my book will address is whether the threat of global warming justifies a significant increase in the use of nuclear power, which (through its entire fuel cycle) generates far less carbon dioxide than fossil fuels. The TMI accident remains a significant hurdle in the public mind to greater use of nuclear power. My book, by examining the entire TMI story, will help the public decide whether what happened at TMI, and in the years that followed, should forever bar increased use of nuclear power. If the financial fall-out of any nuclear accident will conceivably be devastating, the public needs to know that to make an informed choice.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David DeKok", with a large, sweeping flourish at the beginning.

David DeKok