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FYR 83-35

March 23, 1983

Dr. Harold R. Denton
Director of Nuclear Reactor Regulation
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D. C. 20555

Dear Dr. Denton:

The correction by NRC (copy enclosed) of the erroneous statement about scram breaker classification at Yankee, which appeared in the Washington Post on March 16, is very much appreciated.

Although the plant was constructed in 1960 before the term Safety Class had been invented, electrical equipment purchased for use in critical application was afforded special attention in construction, maintenance, and testing. In the early 1970s, when Quality Assurance programs began to develop, this process was formalized and safety classification of electrical equipment was documented. At that time, the reactor trip breakers at Yankee were designated as safety related. Since then, maintenance, testing, repair, and procurement of spare parts associated with these devices have been formally acknowledged as safety-related activities and conducted in accordance with the appropriate written procedures and administrative controls.

The direct results of these controls are hard to quantify; however, for the past ten years, surveillance records show that the reactor trip breakers have been tested (plant trips or surveillance testing) over 3,000 times each without a single failure. We are assured by results such as these that the Yankee plant is being safely and correctly operated and maintained and that our management system is very sound.

Thank you again for your time and every consideration in this matter.

Very truly yours,

YANKEE ATOMIC ELECTRIC COMPANY

D. W. Edwards

Donald W. Edwards, Director
Operational Projects/Licensing

DWE/dd
Enclosure
cc: R. J. Mattson
D. G. Eisenhut
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Editorial
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Report of Yankee Rowe safety problem unfounded

By A. DAVID GRAM
Union Staff

The federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission has retracted its public announcement that automatic emergency shutoff devices at the Yankee Rowe nuclear power plant may be unsafe.

The announcement, made earlier this week, was retracted Thursday.

But the agency stood by a similar report about the Connecticut Yankee plant in Haddam Neck, and officials at the Maine Yankee plant in Wiscasett said tests this week showed similar problems with circuit breakers there.

The circuit breakers are designed to shut down a nuclear reactor at the first sign that the reactor core may be overheating or that the system is becoming overcharged with electricity.

The reports on the safety devices came in the wake of two incidents Feb. 22 and 25 at a nuclear plant in New Jersey. In both cases, circuit breakers failed to shut the system down after the cooling system began acting erratically, allowing the reactor to overheat.

Plant personnel at the Salem I plant in Lower Alloways Creek, N.J. were able to shut the reactor down manually in time to avert a possible meltdown, and prevented any release of radioactivity into the environment.

But NRC officials called the incidents the worst since the Three Mile Island incident in Pennsylvania in 1979. They sharply criticized the plant's owner, Public Service Electric and Gas Co., for lax management and insufficient maintenance of the emergency shutdown systems.

In a meeting between NRC staffers and commissioners Tuesday in Washington, it was disclosed that that Salem I's staff did not include the circuit breakers in the list of "safety-related" plant components requiring strict maintenance.

In comments to reporters after the meeting, Roger Mattson, NRC director of systems integration, said Yankee Rowe, Connecticut Yankee and the Ginna I plant in Rochester, N.Y., also do not list their emergency shutdown systems in the "safety-related" maintenance category.

But in an interview from Washington Thursday, NRC spokesman Robert W. Newlin said, "It was a mistake with Yankee Rowe. Yankee Rowe was not one of them."

Yankee Rowe spokesman William McGee said the plant does list its circuit breakers as "safety-related," and also uses a different type of circuit breaker than the other facilities.

"It's never failed in 23 years of operation. We've used them between 3,000 and 4,000 times," including tests, McGee said.

He said the circuit breakers worked earlier this month when a power line on the plant site snapped under the weight of ice.

A Connecticut Yankee spokesman confirmed that circuit breakers there are not listed as "safety related." But he defended the plant's safety record.

"We have been on top of this problem since day one," Anthony E. Neriocio said. He said the plant's circuit breakers are subjected to routine maintenance and lubrication "at least once a year," as called for by the manufacturer, Westinghouse Electric Co.

He called the "safety-related" designation "a matter of terminology" and said changing the status of the plant's circuit breakers "wouldn't really change anything."

At Maine Yankee, spokesman Donald Vigue said tests on circuit breakers there showed "three of the eight weren't closing as quickly as we would have hoped.

"We cleaned them up, lubricated them and did a little bit of work on them," Vigue said.