

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

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LAP 42



The Honorable J. Bennett Johnston
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Johnston:

This is in response to your request for our "findings and views" with respect to a letter received by you from one of your constituents, Darren Gannuch. Mr. Gannuch expressed concern about the safety of commercial nuclear power in general and the Waterford-3 plant, presently under construction, in particular. Specifically, Mr. Gannuch asked whether "any actions could be taken and if they are being taken", and "what is being done about the present condition of Waterford 3."

The NRC, through its licensing and inspection programs, has been acting to assure that the public health and safety will not be endangered by nuclear power plants including Waterford 3. The licensing process is a two-step procedure. The first step in the licensing process is obtaining a construction permit. Louisiana Power and Light (LP&L) has obtained such a permit to construct Waterford 3. The permit application is a detailed document generally comprising ten or more large volumes of material covering both safety and environmental factors. The application is not only reviewed against the stringent NRC health and safety standards, but it receives state and local government review as well as review by any interested members of the general public. Indeed, a public hearing on the application is a mandatory step in the construction permit stage of the licensing process. Authorization for construction to proceed is not given until the NRC staff has completed environmental impact and site suitability reviews and an appointed licensing board has conducted a public hearing on environmental impact and site suitability with a favorable finding.

Once a construction permit is granted, the construction effort is carefully inspected by region-based and full-time resident NRC inspectors. At Waterford 3 this inspection process resulted in a requirement that LP&L upgrade its quality assurance and quality control programs. Our most recent inspections have determined that these upgrades have been implemented. The NRC must continue to be satisfied that the plant is being constructed in full accord with the NRC-approved technical specifications.

About two or three years before construction of the plant is scheduled to be completed, the construction permit holder files an application for an operating license. An intensive review is made by the NRC of the application and a safety evaluation report and an updated environmental statement are issued. A public hearing may also be held if requested by affected members of the public or at the initiative of the Commission. An operating license is

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only issued after the Commission has assured itself that the plant can be operated in a manner fully consistent with public health and safety. All during the entire lifetime of the plant, the NRC continues its very thorough inspection program to insure that the licensee is complying with the stringent NRC safety regulations and standards. These stringent procedures are rigorously enforced from the beginning of a plant construction phase all the way through its operational phase by means of a statutorily sanctioned enforcement program that provides for tough civil penalties for all significant violations.

Please be assured that the NRC remains committed to its responsibility to protect public health and safety.

Sincerely,

(Signed) T. A. Rehm

WJ

William J. Dircks
Executive Director for Operations

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