



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

August 17, 1992

The Honorable Robert S. Walker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Walker:

This is in reply to your letter of July 21 which enclosed a letter from your constituents Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Porsche raising concerns about the Juragua Nuclear Power Plant being constructed in Cienfuegos, Cuba. I believe that the information below should answer, as far as it is possible from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) perspective, the concerns raised by Mr. and Mrs. Porsche. I am also enclosing, for your information, a status sheet on the Juragua Nuclear Power Plant complex in Cuba.

As Chairman Selin testified before the Senate's Nuclear Regulation Subcommittee of the Committee on Environment and Public Works in February of this year, the NRC has safety concerns about the Juragua reactor complex. These concerns include (a) the adequacy of the regulatory infrastructure (its depth, expertise, and statutory authority); (b) adequacy and numbers of trained regulatory and operational personnel; and (c) the status of the construction of the plant, particularly with the November 1991 announced withdrawal of USSR financing, material and personnel, and reports from Cuban emigres about welding and siting problems at the complex.

In earlier testimony before the Subcommittee on Nuclear Regulation on international non-military nuclear reactor safety, Mr. James M. Taylor, Executive Director for Operations of the NRC, had acknowledged the particular concerns expressed by recent Cuban emigres about welding and siting problems at Juragua. Mr. Taylor said that the technical issues raised could potentially be safety concerns, but the NRC had no way to evaluate their validity or importance without direct access to the site and detailed discussions with the people who are overseeing construction of the plant and who will be responsible for its future operation and regulation.

In 1988, NRC officials participated in discussions with Cuban representatives who visited a U.S. nuclear power plant, and in a 1989 reciprocal visit, a senior NPC official toured the Juragua site. However, U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba has not accommodated an expansion of these earlier contacts.

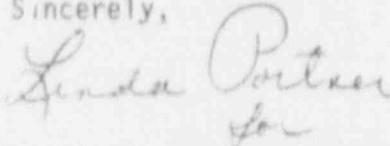
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The Honorable Robert S. Walker

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I appreciate the opportunity to aid you in responding to questions concerning nuclear power. Please let me know if I can be of help in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Linda Porter".

Dennis K. Rathbun, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

Enclosure:
Status of the Juragua Nuclear
Power Plant

Status of the Juragua Nuclear Power Plant

The Juragua Nuclear Power Plant was planned to have four USSR-designed VVER-440/318 model reactors with bubbler/condensers and reinforced concrete containment domes with carbon steel liners. The pressure vessel for Unit 1 was shipped from the USSR in 1991 and is now in storage on site. In September 1991 the Cubans completed the airtight sealing of the dome of Unit 1. Civil construction of Unit 2 is about 20 percent complete, and Units 3 and 4 have not been begun.

There is a question about whether, or when, the Juragua plants will be finished. It has been reported that the civil construction (the external building and some support facilities) of Unit 1 of the Juragua complex is essentially complete, although the mechanical installations (everything from control room instrumentation, chemical and other electrical equipment, to the reactor itself) is only about 35 percent complete. Construction, due to lack of funds and diminished Russian assistance, is virtually at a standstill. Somewhere from 50 to 200 Russian technicians reported still on site. U.S. legislators testified before the Senate's Nuclear Regulation Subcommittee of the Committee on Environment and Public Works in May 1992 that Cuba had officially informed that Russia would not provide continuing support for the Juragua nuclear power plants unless Russia was paid in hard currency. Negotiations between Cuba and Russia are proceeding, and Cuba has contacted other countries, although not the U.S., for construction, technical and safety assistance.

In 1989 the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) completed a limited special study of the Juragua complex. The Cuban VVER-440/318s and a comparable U.S. pressurized water reactor are designed to accommodate similar types of accidents, but it is difficult to determine the relative capability of the different designs to deal with more severe accidents. An assessment of the actual relative risk of the Cuban plants may well be different, depending on specifics that the NRC cannot evaluate due to unavailable information.