

Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee
148 Washington Street
Duxbury, Massachusetts 02332
December 3, 1992

50-293

Re: Request For NRC Public Meeting To Up-Date Community
On Status Condensate Pot (Water Measuring Device)
At Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station

Dear Secretary Chilk:

The Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee requests the NRC come to Plymouth to up-date us on the status of the condensate pot. We further request the meeting be scheduled quickly.

Many meetings, theories and discussions have transpired since August (1992) between the NRC, Boston Edison and the Boiling Water Operators Group on this subject.

We would like to hear about these theories-what they are and an evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses. Further, we would like to be appraised of future actions planned and time tables. Unfortunately, we as citizens are left to rely largely on newspaper articles for our information as we can not readily travel to Washington. This is not satisfactory.

We understand that the Condensate Pot is the main instrument to measure the water level in the reactor core. According to Paul Blanche, an engineer from Northeast Utilities, its design is faulty. This has been confirmed by the NRC in, for example, their recent Inspection Report No. 50-293/92-17. The device will give erroneously high readings during an accident (or during any rapid depressurization), showing that the reactor core is covered with water when in fact it could be dangerously exposed, and thus lead to a serious melt down. At Pilgrim, there is a history of faulty readings with this instrument.

The Plymouth Board of Selectmen invited the NRC, as you know, to a meeting in Plymouth on August 29, 1992 to answer questions concerning the condensate pot. The NRC was asked at that time to bring to the meeting experts from their Research Division so matters of technical substance could be addressed at the meeting. Also, Paul Blanche and representatives from Boston Edison attended. The public was free to ask questions.

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We request any up-coming meeting follow the same format; and Mr. Thadani, along with other NRC "experts" and individuals of responsibility, be present.

Some of our concerns, and reasons for wanting a public meeting in the very near future, are as follows:

After the August meeting, The Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee submitted a list of written questions to the NRC (Docket No. 50-293). Please make note of question 17, p.7.

- Q. "Would NRC regulations require Pilgrim station to shut down if the reactor water level instrumentation was completely inoperable?"
- A. "Yes... would require a reactor shutdown if the reactor vessel water level instrumentation were inoperable."

One issue, then, is the definition of "inoperable". A Patriot Ledger article recently quoted Paul Blanche as saying,

"...we should declare these instruments inoperable."

In that same Patriot Ledger article, Ashok Thadani, Director of Systems Safety Analysis at the NRC was quoted as saying,

"It's still an important enough issue that they'll (BECC) have to make improvements. We really want instruments to be reliable."

Ivan Selin, the Chairman of the NRC, was quoted as being, "fuzzy on the issue"--so are we.

We have also been told by BECO and the NRC to, "Relax, Be Happy" because the operators have undergone special training to learn how to interpret inaccurate readings and what actions to take when vessel level cannot be accurately determined. However, in the NRC Inspection Report No. 50-293/92-17 (Oct 7, 1992),

"One area identified for improvement related to the operators capabilities for using the Safety parameter Display System (SPDS) computer. Some operators were not familiar with the computer systems response to reactor water level instrument failures. The inspector recognized that part of the problem could be that the SPDS computer is not functional in the plant specific simulator."

The "toy" is scheduled to be fixed next year. To a layman, it could seem reasonable to focus efforts on fixing the problem--the condensate pot.

A few weeks ago, the Boiling Water Reactor Owners Group met with the NRC and heard from Boston Edison. At that meeting, Pilgrim claimed to have found the solution to the false readings. According to the Patriot Ledger,

" Boston Edison said it found tiny leaks in Pilgrim's water-level instrumentation that apparently allow gas to enter the gauge. They hope that fixing the leaks will put an end to false readings".

Although, the public must rely on newspaper articles, it appears there are contrary opinions--the jury is still out on the issue. My understanding is that neither Ashok Thadani of the NRC nor Paul Blanche of Northeast utilities feel it will "fix" the problem. Data has been presented to the NRC and it is again time for the public to meet with the NRC for a progress report.

We look forward to your prompt response; and, to an up-coming meeting so we can feel assured the NRC has embarked on a path regarding this important device that is truly protective of public health and safety.

Sincerely,



Mary Elizabeth Lampert
Chair, Duxbury Nuclear Advisory Committee

cc

Vice President Elect Al Gore
Senator Edward Kennedy
Senator John Kerry
Representative Gerry Studds
Representative Joseph Kennedy
Governor William Weld
Senator Elect Brian McDonald
Senator Elect Theresa Murray
Selectmen, Towns of Duxbury, Kingston, Plymouth