

50-461



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

January 27, 1997

Mr. Larry D. Haab  
Chief Executive Officer  
Illinois Power Company  
500 South 27th Street  
Decatur, IL 62525

Dear Mr. Haab:

On January 14, 15, and 17, 1997, NRC senior managers met to evaluate the nuclear safety performance of operating reactors, fuel facilities, and other materials licensees. This meeting is conducted semiannually to determine whether the safety performance of various licensees warrants increased NRC attention.

The Commission has directed that, during these meetings, NRC senior managers also identify those plants whose performance is trending adversely and that steps be taken to communicate concerns to the utility's corporate president or board of directors. This early notification to the highest levels within the utility's organization is intended to allow appropriate measures to be taken by the licensee to address the areas of concern.

This letter is to advise you that during the January Senior Management Meeting, recent trends in the performance at the Clinton Nuclear Power Station raised sufficient concerns that we believe a meeting with you would be appropriate.

NRC's inspection into the September 5, 1996, reactor recirculation pump seal failure identified that while attempting to continue power operation, Illinois Power staff violated procedures which further degraded the pump seal and increased reactor coolant system leak rate. Additional inspection activities, including the Operations Safety Team Inspection (OSTI), confirmed our initial findings and identified additional performance related issues. The performance issues included examples of non-conservative safety focus in decision making, poor procedural adherence and adequacy, weak engineering and maintenance support to operations, and a lack of discipline and rigor during conduct of operations.

While these issues were highlighted by the recirculation pump seal event, they were evident in other events during the last year. To shorten an upcoming outage, your staff, in late 1995, considered breaching containment while at power to pre-stage equipment. To facilitate returning to power following the April 1996 scram, the facility was maintained in Mode 3 utilizing safety relief valves (SRVs) to control pressure, challenging the SRVs approximately 85 times. Most recently, three individuals were contaminated when they performed an activity without appropriate procedural guidance.

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The performance issues were also reflected in routine activities. Some operational evaluations for degraded equipment were not rigorously performed. Examples were identified where the normal procedural development processes were bypassed by inappropriately using Action Plans to direct equipment manipulations; and, several control room and equipment material condition deficiencies were allowed to exist for extended time periods, some complicating the September 5, 1996 event.

Recent NRC observations indicate that your staff is initiating corrective actions to address these deficiencies. The NRC acknowledges your recent management and staff changes and the commitments identified in Mr. Connell's December 9, 1996, letter to address Clinton's performance problems. NRC confirmed the commitments outlined in your December 9, 1996, letter in a Confirmatory Action Letter (CAL No. RIII-97-001) signed by Mr. A. Bill Beach and issued January 9, 1997. Success in resolving these performance concerns will continue to require strong management commitment to safety and continued vigilance in identifying and correcting safety issues.

Mr. A. Bill Beach, the NRC Region III Administrator in Lisle, Illinois, will be contacting you to arrange for a mutually agreeable time and location for a meeting covering the performance at Clinton Nuclear Power Station.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Original signed by:

Hugh L. Thompson, Jr.  
Acting Executive Director  
for Operations

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