



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

February 9, 1999

The Honorable Michael P. Forbes
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Forbes:

I am responding to your letter of January 6, 1999, in which you raised concerns about the operating history of Millstone Unit 3 since it restarted in July 1998 and the continued lack of an emergency management plan for Eastern Long Island. You requested that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) ensure that Millstone Unit 2 remains closed, convene a public meeting on Long Island to discuss Northeast Utilities' plan to restart Millstone Unit 2, and permanently shut down Millstone Unit 3.

The overall plant performance at Millstone Unit 3 since its restart in July 1998 has been generally typical of a plant returning to service after a lengthy shutdown. The five events noted in your letter (one shutdown, three manual trips, and one automatic trip) resulted in expected plant transients, and no abnormalities were observed either during the transients or during plant recovery. The overall risk significance of these plant shutdowns was low and plant operators responded well to the challenges, exhibiting conservative decisionmaking and deliberate efforts to ensure safety and compliance with procedural requirements. Licensee management has initiated an assessment of the number and severity of challenges facing the plant operations staff since the return to power operations. Recognition on the part of senior licensee management of the need for increased attention to this area, as well as to the reduction of existing operator burdens, is reflected in its recent initiative to provide a renewed "operational focus" to all activities and decisions affecting the unit.

In NRC Inspection Report 50-423/98-05, dated January 7, 1999, the NRC staff addressed the multiple plant trips and stated that the licensee's response to these trips confirmed proper operator response to the plant and equipment challenges. The NRC staff further stated that continued licensee management attention must be directed toward reducing the backlog of equipment problems and other issues that have the potential to create future operational challenges to the Millstone Unit 3 operations staff. The NRC staff believes that the operational history at Millstone since July 1998 does not warrant plant shutdown; however, we plan to continue increased regulatory oversight at Millstone Unit 3 until the plant establishes and maintains the appropriate level of safety performance.

As discussed in your letter, on January 4, 1999, water containing low levels of tritium and trace amounts of other radionuclides (a total of approximately 0.0217 curies) leaked out of the Millstone Unit 3 waste test tank before the licensee could isolate the leak. Heavy rain at that time carried the slightly contaminated water to Niantic Bay. A berm, which was designed to retain any water leaking from the tank, failed to contain the leak. The tritium release was diluted in Niantic Bay and doses were evaluated based on fish and seafood consumption, as

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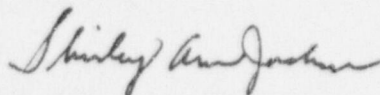
well as recreational use of the Bay. The dose is well below radiation dose design objectives for maintaining effluent releases as low as reasonably achievable in accordance with Appendix I to 10 CFR Part 50. (The doses to a member of the public calculated to result from the release of this radioactivity would be 2.2×10^{-10} rem, as compared to the public dose limit from licensed activities, 0.1 rem, found in 10 CFR 20.1301.) As is the situation with marine sites, we did not include the drinking water pathway in this estimate. The licensee has investigated why the berm did not contain the leak and has lined the berm with an impermeable membrane. After the appropriate analysis was performed on the remaining water in the waste test tank, the contents (more than 15,000 gallons) were released to Niantic Bay through the normal release path, which is a normal evolution at the plant and allowed under NRC regulations.

As discussed in my letter to you dated June 8, 1998, proposals have been made to both increase and decrease the 10-mile emergency planning zone (EPZ) distance since this policy was established following the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979. After consideration of these proposals and their supporting documentation and rationale, the Commission has consistently concluded that an EPZ of about 10 miles in radius provides an acceptable planning basis for emergency response. In your January 6 letter, you indicated that Northeast Utilities is assisting each of the five east end towns of Long Island and Suffolk County with creating a coordinated emergency plan and establishing an open line of communication to ensure that Eastern Long Island is considered when decisions are made regarding the Millstone plants. I encourage the communities involved to continue the ongoing dialogue with Northeast Utilities, as well as appropriate state and county officials, to develop the plans they believe are needed.

With regard to Millstone Unit 2, the staff is utilizing NRC Inspection Manual Chapter (IMC) 0350, "Staff Guidelines for Restart Authorization," as a guide for plant restart. As part of its execution of IMC 0350, the staff developed a Restart Assessment Plan to capture the NRC actions required before the NRC approves plant restart. The results of the NRC inspections and the status of Millstone Unit 2 plant readiness are discussed at periodic public meetings in the vicinity of the Millstone site. The last such meeting was held on January 11, 1999, and was attended by several members of citizens groups from Long Island. During the meeting, the NRC staff answered questions from members of the public regarding many aspects of NRC regulatory oversight. As you are aware, the NRC staff also held a public meeting on Long Island on May 26, 1998, to discuss emergency planning, and will continue to conduct periodic public meetings in the vicinity of Millstone to discuss activities at Millstone Station. The staff will conduct a similar meeting on Long Island prior to a Unit 2 restart decision.

I assure you that a Commission decision authorizing the restart of Millstone Unit 2 will be made only when the Commission is satisfied that the conditions that led to the extended shutdown have been corrected to our satisfaction, regardless of the length of time that process may take. The NRC staff is available to brief you or your staff on pertinent Millstone Station issues at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Shirley Ann Jackson