



Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

JUL 24 1986

Mr. Victor Stello, Jr.
Executive Director for Operations
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Mr. Stello:

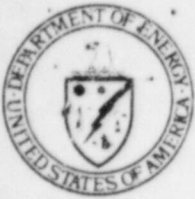
The enclosed letter dated July 3, 1986, from Ms. Kathy W. Brinson requested information concerning safety of the Savannah River Plant (SRP) reactors and the startup of Plant Vogtle. The Department of Energy has replied to the safety issue at SRP (Enclosure 2) and recommends that you provide the information requested concerning Plant Vogtle.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John L. Meinhardt".

John L. Meinhardt
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Nuclear Materials
Defense Programs

2 Enclosures:
Ltr fm Brinson, dtd 7/3/86
DOE Reply to Brinson Ltr



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

JUL 24 1986

Ms. Kathy W. Brinson
Rt. 2, Box 77
Sylvania, GA 30467

Dear Ms. Brinson:

Thank you for your letter of July 3, 1986, concerning reactor safety at the Savannah River Plant (SRP) in Aiken, South Carolina. As the organization within the Department of Energy (DOE) responsible for this matter, your letter has been forwarded to this office for a reply.

All nuclear reactors in the United States, DOE reactors at SRP as well as commercial reactors, comply with national and international standards and guidance. The system of regulations which we have in place has its roots in the Atomic Energy Commission and has served us extremely well. Under this system, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regulates commercial reactors such as Plant Vogtle, and DOE regulates the private companies and universities which operate the production and research reactors owned by the Government. To this end, DOE's nuclear safety program includes the clear assignment of responsibility and accountability for safety to DOE and contractor line managers in Headquarters and the field sites such as SRP. In addition, independent safety oversight organizations at these levels assure that managers fully adhere to good safety practices.

The existing confinement systems for the SRP reactors were selected and designed as the most appropriate method of reducing radionuclide releases in the event of an accident and assuring that doses at the boundary and beyond are within Federal guidelines (10 CFR 100). Features such as the very low temperatures and pressures of the SRP reactors make confinement particularly suitable for these reactors, while containment systems are more appropriate to accommodate the high energy and low heat transfer capacity inherent in water-cooled commercial power reactors in the United States. As part of our ongoing program to make operation of our reactors as safe as possible, DOE investigated the cost and benefits of constructing containment structures. The modification of the four SRP reactors from confinement to containment would be physically feasible but would clearly be an extremely difficult job, costing approximately \$3-4 billion and requiring 3-4 years of construction time. We believe that improvements to the existing confinement system will prove to be a more cost-effective method of reducing potential offsite releases. While the SRP reactors are 30 years old, we have continually modernized them such that they now have safety features which are considered state of the art in the nuclear industry. We will continue to emphasize safety at the SRP.

DOE has developed extensive emergency response plans at the SRP and tested them in a mock nuclear accident exercise in November 1984. All organizations, including the States of South Carolina and Georgia, DOE, Aiken County, the news media, and the public felt that the exercise validated DOE's nuclear emergency response plans.

Since Plant Vogtle is a commercial nuclear power plant, your request for information concerning its startup has been referred to the NRC.

Your interest in this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,

John L. Meinhardt
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Nuclear Materials
Defense Programs