



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

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FEB 27 1989

Ms. Cheryl D. Jay  
9 Rose Avenue  
Savannah, Georgia 31406

Dear Ms. Jay:

I am responding to your letter of February 2, 1989, to Chairman Zech. In your letter, you expressed concerns about your family's safety because you live near the nuclear plant located near Baxley, Georgia. The plant referred to is the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, operated by the Georgia Power Company on behalf of itself and several other part owners. The plant consists of two boiling-water reactors (BWRs) located on the south bank of the Altamaha River, approximately 11 miles north of Baxley. Each reactor is of the BWR-4 product line designed by the General Electric Company (GE), and each uses a Mark I containment structure. Unit 1 at the plant has been in operation for nearly 15 years, and Unit 2 has been operating for nearly 11 years. During this period, neither unit has experienced any significant safety problems.

You specifically mentioned the 1987 Reed Report as having been produced by the NRC and as having identified safety problems with the Mark I containment design. I assume that you are referring to NUREG-1285, "NRC Staff Evaluation of the General Electric Company Nuclear Reactor Study ("Reed Report")," issued in July 1987. The actual "Reed Report" was an internal product-improvement study performed by GE personnel in 1975, and NUREG-1285 is a report of an evaluation performed by NRC personnel of the various issues raised by the original GE study. I am enclosing a copy of NUREG-1285 for your information. NUREG-1285 did not identify Mark I containments as being unsafe; rather, the report concluded that:

- "(1) The Reed Report does not identify any matters that would support a need to curtail the operation of any GE boiling water reactor plants now licensed.
- (2) The Reed Report does not identify any new safety issues of which the staff was unaware.
- (3) While certain issues addressed by the Reed Report are still being studied by the NRC and the industry, there is a basis for permitting continued plant operations while those issues are being resolved."

Over the past several years, the NRC staff has performed studies of potential severe accidents of extremely low probability at light water reactors similar to the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant. All the studies have shown that the Mark I Boiling Water Reactor (BWRs) are safe and do not pose an undue risk. However, to further improve the capability of Mark I containments, the staff has undertaken a program to study the benefits of additional Mark I containments improvements which would further enhance their ability to mitigate the consequences of severe accidents, should they occur. If the staff studies indicate that the additional improvements are justified, the NRC will propose such improvements for all plants similar to the Edwin I. Hatch.

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Ms. Cheryl Jay

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The NRC continually strives to ensure that all nuclear plants are operated safely. Each plant is subjected to multiple inspections each year to ensure that operations are conducted in accordance with approved procedures and in compliance with the terms of the license authorizing operation. Resident inspectors are assigned to each nuclear site to maintain day-to-day cognizance of operations. Safety systems and equipment are tested routinely to ensure that they will perform their safety functions if called upon to do so. Both the plant operators and the NRC search for cost-effective measures that can be taken to further improve plant safety. We believe that our inspection program, the required plant systems testing, and the improvements to plant design that result from our continuing review, combine to ensure that future plant operations are conducted safely.

In summary, the NRC does not consider boiling water reactors with Mark I containments to be unsafe. To the contrary, we consider that this class of nuclear plant is capable of safe operation without posing a significant risk to the public health and safety. Nonetheless, we continually strive to ensure that all nuclear plants are made even more safe. I trust that this information is responsive to your concerns.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By:

Gus C. Lainas, Acting Director  
Division of Reactor Projects - I/II  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Enclosure:  
NUREG-1285

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