



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

July 7, 1989

The Honorable William S. Cohen
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cohen:

This letter is in response to your letter of June 19, 1989 to Chairman Lando Zech of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. You wrote on behalf of a constituent, Roberta Drake, who expressed concerns about the startup of the Seabrook Nuclear Station. I would like to provide you with some information that may be useful in putting nuclear power plant safety in proper perspective for Seabrook.

Federal regulations for the design, construction, and operation of nuclear power reactors have been established with the objective of assuring that the probability is very small that a serious accident will occur at a nuclear power plant resulting in the release of radioactive materials in amounts that would present a threat to the public health and safety. The NRC relies on a "defense-in-depth" concept to achieve its safety goals. Briefly stated, this concept (1) requires high quality in the design, construction, and operation of nuclear plants to reduce the likelihood of malfunctions in the first instance; (2) recognizes that equipment can fail and operators can make mistakes, therefore requiring safety systems to reduce the chances that malfunctions will lead to accidents that release fission products from the fuel; and (3) recognizes that, in spite of these precautions, serious fuel damage accidents can happen, therefore requiring containment structures and other safety features to prevent the release of fission products offsite.

Emergency planning requirements have been adopted as an added conservatism to the NRC's defense-in-depth safety philosophy. The added feature of emergency planning provides that, even in the unlikely event of an offsite fission product release, there is reasonable assurance that protective actions can be taken to protect the population around nuclear power plants. Although there is no absolute guarantee of safety, the NRC's objective is to assure that the risk to the public health and safety from the consequences of nuclear power plant operation is comparable to or less than the risk of generating electricity by other competing technologies and is not a significant addition to other societal risks.

The NRC has conducted extensive review of the Seabrook facility and portions of that review are still ongoing. As you may be aware, Public Service of New Hampshire was granted a license on May 26, 1989, to operate the facility at power levels up to 5 percent of full-power. This license allowed the utility to conduct initial low-power testing at Seabrook. The NRC has not made a decision regarding issuance of a full-power license for Seabrook as staff reviews and the hearing process are not complete.

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The Honorable William S. Cohen

- 2 -

I assure you that the NRC takes its responsibilities seriously and will not authorize the Seabrook facility to operate at power unless the Agency is convinced that it can be operated safely and that the public health and safety will be protected.

Sincerely,

Original signed by
Victor Stello, Jr.

Victor Stello, Jr.
Executive Director for
Operations

*See previous concurrence

[GREEN TICKET 0004569]

OFC	:PDI-*	:PDI-3	:DIR/PDI-3*	:TECH.EDITOR*	:ADP1:DRPR	:D:DRPR	:ADP
NAME	:MRushbrook	:VNenses	:RWessman	:B. Calvane	:BBoger	:SVarga	:JPantlow
DATE	:6/29/89	:6/29/89	:6/29/89	:6/30/89	:6/30/89	:6/30/89	:7/3

OFC	:D:ONRR	:EDO	:OCA	:	:	:	:
NAME	:TMurphy	:VStello	:JWC	:	:	:	:
DATE	:6/29/89	:6/30/89	:6/30/89	:	:	:	:

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY

GREEN TICKET 0004569

DISTRIBUTION

~~Docket File~~

NRC PDR

Local PDR

EDO #0004569

EDO Reading

TMurley/JSniezek

JPartlow

PDI-3 r/f w/incoming

PDI-3 Green Ticket File

SVarga (2)

BBoger

OGC

CRC-98-0597

VStello

DMossburg, PMAS (ED00004569) w/incoming

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See 89-0597



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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

ACTION

EDO Principal Correspondence Control

FROM:

DUE: 07/11/89

EDO CONTROL: 0004569

DOC DT: 06/19/89

FINAL REPLY:

SEN. WILLIAM S. COHEN

TO:

CHAIRMAN ZECH

FOR SIGNATURE OF:

** GRN **

CRC NO: 89-0597

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DESC:

ROUTING:

ENCLS LETTER FROM ROBERTA E. DRAKE EXPRESSING
CONCERN ABOUT OPENING OF SEABROOK PLANT

RUSSELL, RI

DATE: 06/26/89

ASSIGNED TO:

CONTACT:

NRR

MURLEY

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OR REMARKS:

NRR RECEIVED: JUNE 26, 1989

ACTION: DRPR:VARGA

NRR ROUTING: MURLEY/SNIEZEK
MIRAGLIA
PARTLOW
CRUTCHFIELD
GILLESPIE
MOSSBURG

ACTION

DUE TO NRR DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

BY July 6, 1989

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
CORRESPONDENCE CONTROL TICKET

PAPER NUMBER: CRC-89-0597 65 LOGGING DATE: Jun 24 89
ACTION OFFICE: EDO
AUTHOR: W.S. Cohen--Const Ref
AFFILIATION: UNITED STATES SENATE
LETTER DATE: Jun 19 89 FILE CODE: ID&R-5 Seabrook
SUBJECT: Concerned about the activation of the Seabrook
nuclear power plant
ACTION: Direct Reply
DISTRIBUTION: OCA to Ack
SPECIAL HANDLING: None
NOTES: Roberta Drake
DATE DUE: Jun 19 89
SIGNATURE: . DATE SIGNED:
AFFILIATION:

Rec'd Off. EDO

Date 6-26-89

Time 730 A

EDO--004569