



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

SEP 20 1999

September 10, 1999

**The Honorable Paul D. Coverdell
United States Senator
100 Colony Square, Suite 300
1175 Peachtree Street N. E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30361**

Dear Senator Coverdell:

I am responding to your letter to Mr. Dennis Rathbun of August 9, 1999. You asked us to review John Sherman's letter of August 2, 1999, and reply to you at your Georgia office.

Mr. Sherman is concerned that the Farley Nuclear Plant and other nuclear plants are not yet Year 2000 (Y2K) compliant. He mentioned the following issues associated with nuclear plant Y2K compliance:

- (1) Farley's Y2K ready date (not compliant date) is December 16, 1999.
- (2) It takes 4 to 6 months to shut down a reactor, and the reactor must be cooled the entire time.
- (3) The Farley plant and other Y2K non-compliant plants should be shut down right now if items (1) and (2) are correct.

Before I address the Farley Nuclear Plant, I want to explain the difference between the terms "Y2K ready" and "Y2K compliant." "Y2K compliant" generally means that computer systems or applications will accurately process date/time data from, into, and between the twentieth and twenty-first century (the years 1999 and 2000), and leap-year calculations. "Y2K ready" generally means that a computer system or application is suitable for continued use into the year 2000 even though the computer system, application, or device is not fully Y2K compliant. In other words, being Y2K ready means Farley Nuclear Plant components would function properly through rollover to the new millennium even though they might not display the correct date on a readout device, chart or recorder. For Y2K ready systems, utilities may have to take additional measures to ensure that the systems, components, and equipment function as intended. For example, plant operators could set a computer clock back to another year to make a system Y2K ready. The system would still function properly through rollover to the new millennium. They would then make the system Y2K compliant at a later date. Most nuclear plant items are now Y2K compliant.

In response to item (1), the Farley Nuclear Plant, Unit 1, is Y2K ready. However, to make the second Farley plant (Unit 2) Y2K ready, Southern Nuclear Operating Company (SNC) needs to fix one more item. SNC needs to modify and test computer software on its system that controls the Unit 2 steam turbine. The system that controls the steam turbine does not affect plant safety. The steam turbine turns an attached electrical generator to produce electricity. SNC has successfully modified and tested the turbine control computer software on Unit 1, but it needs to wait until the next Unit 2 refueling shutdown later this Fall to modify and test the Unit 2 steam turbine computer software.

Honorable Paul D. Coverdell

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Regarding items (2) and (3), SNC completes a routine Farley plant shutdown from full operating power in about 18 hours. It takes only a few seconds to manually or automatically shut down a nuclear plant in an emergency. These routine and emergency shutdown times are reasonable averages for all nuclear power plants. SNC plans to shut down Unit 2 for refueling and other maintenance, modify and test the software, and begin producing power again by about December 16, 1999. We do not expect the Y2K issue to affect the safety of the Farley Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2, or their ability to supply electrical power to the national electric power grid. Thus, we see no reason to shut down Farley Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2. Furthermore, we have undertaken an exhaustive effort to ensure that all nuclear power plants that are not fully ready for Y2K are on track to be Y2K ready before the end of the year.

Enclosed is the latest NRC status report on Y2K activities. We recently completed our onsite Y2K reviews at all 103 U.S. nuclear power plants and have confirmed that there are no Y2K-related problems which affect the performance of safety systems needed to safely shut down the plants. More Y2K information is available on our Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/Y2K/Y2KReady.html>.

I hope that this information is responsive to Mr. Sherman's concerns. I am happy to give you any more details that you might need.

Sincerely,


for William D. Travers
Executive Director
for Operations

Enclosure: NRC Y2K Status Report

Town has radiation scare

Concerns stem from problems at government plant

PADUCAH, Ky. (AP) — The way employees tell it, the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant sometimes operated as if Homer Simpson were running the place. Except that what happened there wasn't funny.

Workers used to wipe "green salt" off the plant lunch tables, fully aware it was a radioactive byproduct of the plant's main task — enriching uranium for use as fuel in nuclear reactors.

They would bury truckloads of uranium shavings that ignited and burned upon being exposed to the air. They would dump thousands of barrels filled with radioactive contaminants into ponds and bury them in the ground. All the while, they were told they were working with materials that were "safe enough to eat."

Now the employees and many other people in Paducah fear they are dying because of what happened at the 47-year-old plant, McCracken County's biggest source of jobs.

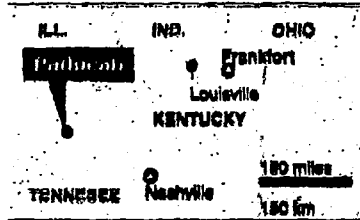
Chris Naas, a heavy-equipment operator who has worked at the plant for 25 years, told Senate investigators this week that he was taken off a job in 1974 after being told he was "hot" — meaning, he assumed, that he had been exposed to too much radiation.

Naas said his father turned up "hot" on several occasions during the 20 years he worked at the plant.

"Today, he has a form of terminal cancer — lymphoma. We will never know what was the cause," Naas said. "My question is: Will I turn up the same, and what recourse will I have?"

In June, three plant employees filed a federal lawsuit alleging that workers unwittingly were exposed to plutonium and other highly toxic substances from 1953 to 1976. The lawsuit is sealed.

The Energy Department,



AP

which owns the plant and is overseeing a \$1 billion cleanup, later acknowledged that 103,000 tons of recycled uranium containing a total of 12 ounces of plutonium were handled in Paducah during the period.

Plutonium is much more potent than uranium — it can cause cancer if ingested in quantities as small as one-millionth of an ounce. The Energy Department is investigating why workers were exposed to plutonium and whether contractors who operated the plant covered it up.

"We were told that the uranium

substances we were working with were safe and posed no threat to our health, or to the health of our families," Garland "Bud" Jenkins, who worked there for 30 years, told a House committee Wednesday in Washington. "We were even told the materials were safe enough to eat."

The plant site, with its combined enrichment and cleanup operations, is the county's largest employer with 2,000 workers.

But plant workers are not the only people in this rural area in western Kentucky who are questioning whether their health has been compromised.

Energy Secretary Bill Richardson apologized for the government's secrecy about the plutonium during a recent town hall meeting in Paducah and has proposed \$20 million in compensation for plant workers with certain radiation-related cancers.

ACTION

EDO Principal Correspondence Control

FROM: DUE: 11/18/99

EDO CONTROL: G19990563
DOC DT: 10/27/99
FINAL REPLY:

Senator Paul D. Coverdell

TO:
Rathbun, OCA

FOR SIGNATURE OF : ** GRN **
Travers, EDO

CRC NO: 99-0910

DESC:
Y2K READINESS -- FARLEY NUCLEAR POWER PLANT
(John M. Sherman)

ROUTING:
Travers
Paperiello
Miraglia
Norry
Blaha
Burns
Congel, IRO
Beecher, OPA
Satorius, OEDO

DATE: 11/04/99

ASSIGNED TO: NRR
CONTACT: Collins

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NRR Action : WJPM: Zwolinski
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Sharon
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BY 11/15/99

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CORRESPONDENCE CONTROL TICKET

PAPER NUMBER: CRC-99-0910

LOGGING DATE: Nov 3 99

ACTION OFFICE: EDO

AUTHOR: PAUL COVERDELL
AFFILIATION: U.S. SENATE

ADDRESSEE: RATHBUN

LETTER DATE: Oct 27 99 FILE CODE: IDR 5 FARLEY

SUBJECT: FARLEY NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

ACTION: Signature of EDO

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DATE DUE: Nov 18 99

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