

April 1, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of January 19, 2007, regarding NRC's development of security requirements for new reactors. In your letter, you encourage the Commission to take advantage of the advances in technology and the much better understanding of terrorist threats that have evolved since the current operating fleet of reactors were designed. I want to assure you that the NRC has not only taken significant steps to increase safety and security at the Nation's nuclear power plants but is also applying these lessons to the next generation of nuclear power plants. Additionally, the Commission agrees that the safety and security of potential new reactor facilities are a high priority.

Rulemaking activities are the principal means by which the NRC will require the next generation of nuclear power plant applicants to factor the lessons that were learned at our operating reactors into new plant designs and layouts. The NRC is conducting a series of rulemakings to clarify the regulatory basis for the security of these plants. The pertinent rulemakings include significant revisions to 10 CFR Part 73, "Physical Protection of Plants and Materials" which, in part, describes the design basis threat (DBT) characteristics against which licensee security programs must defend and the performance objectives and requirements for the development of licensee physical protection programs. In addition, the rule revisions would incorporate the security requirements imposed by Commission orders issued after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The proposed rule has been published for public comment, and a final rule is anticipated to be issued in early 2008.

As noted in your letter, the NRC requires that commercial nuclear power plants be designed for accidents, natural disasters, and attacks. NRC studies have shown that nuclear power plants, due to their designs, are inherently robust structures that provide adequate protection in a terrorist attack using an aircraft. However, the Commission is currently evaluating additional ways to address the threat of aircraft strikes for future nuclear reactors. The Commission will keep you informed of its progress on this issue.

If you have further questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Dale E. Klein