

December 20, 2010

The Honorable Jerry F. Costello
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Costello:

Thank you for your letter of December 6, 2010, regarding safety concerns at the Honeywell facility in Metropolis, Illinois. I just returned from a visit to this facility, so your inquiry is especially timely.

Honeywell has been in the midst of a labor dispute with its plant operation workforce. In June of this year, Honeywell locked out the unionized workers after both sides failed to make progress on a renewed labor contract. Honeywell replaced those employees with salaried company employees and temporary workers. To date, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) inspectors have performed approximately 800 inspection hours to verify that licensed activities conducted by salaried and temporary employees were conducted safely. NRC inspectors were onsite in the weeks leading up to and following the replacement of workers to evaluate Honeywell's strike contingency plan and observe the training of all temporary workers. Since that time, we have continued our oversight and enhanced our ongoing inspection program, followed up on operational issues, met with plant managers, and observed ongoing operations.

Last month, the NRC issued two inspection reports covering the periods of June 7 through September 9, and September 13 through 17, 2010, respectively. Those reports discussed four occurrences where licensee activities were not in compliance with requirements in Honeywell's NRC license. Two of those occurrences happened when salaried employees and temporary workers had been operating the plant. The noncompliances involved one case in which workers were not trained in accordance with the requirements and a second case in which operating procedures were not followed, resulting in an uncontrolled ignition in a furnace. Those occurrences have been discussed with the licensee and resolved to NRC's satisfaction, including retraining the workers that had not been appropriately trained. No injuries or releases of radiological material resulted from these noncompliances, and the plant continues to be operated safely. I personally visited the facility on December 9, 2010, observed plant operations, and met with employees, union representatives, and management to emphasize the importance of, and our expectations for, continued safe operation. While I was there, I also met with the mayor, the fire chief, the chief of police, and the city's emergency planning manager to discuss Honeywell operations.

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The NRC takes our safety obligations and oversight responsibilities very seriously and we will continue to ensure that the licensed activities at the Metropolis plant are conducted safely and in accordance with NRC requirements. If you have any additional questions, please contact me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Gregory B. Jaczko