

Three Mile Island Alert

The Newsletter of Three Mile Island Alert

November 1997

Three Mile Island Vents Radioactive Steam

from a June 21, 1997, New York Times article

The Three Mile Island nuclear plant vented steam with a trace of radioactivity today after a brief power failure shut down the reactor, said its operator, GPU Nuclear. The plant lost its outside power when one of two circuit breakers in the island's switch yard failed. Neil A. Sheehan, Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman, said the cause had not been determined. Though the reactor shut down automatically, its fuel continued to generate heat, and without power to run the pumps that carry the heat away, the plant's valves released steam.

Off-site power was restored 90 minutes after it failed, but by late afternoon the plant was still releasing steam because the pumps had not been re-started, said Laura Larinch, a spokeswoman for GPU Nuclear, the subsidiary of General Public Utilities that runs the plant.

[Editor's note: The EFMR Monitoring Network, a citizens' radiation monitoring group reports that its Low Volume Air Samplers did not detect any unusual radiation activity in the samples collected on June 24 after the emergency shut-down of TMI on June 21.]

GPU Nuclear To Pay \$210,000 NRC Fine

from an October 14, 1997, The Energy Daily article

GPU Nuclear officials said last week that the company will pay a \$210,000 fine levied by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for violations identified at the Three Mile Island Unit 1 reactor.

In responding to the fine, Jim Langenbach, GPU Nuclear vice president and director of TMI, said the company has implemented immediate corrective actions to address the issues identified by NRC, and also has a number of long-term plans it will complete over the course of the next year. "We are committed--on behalf of our neighbors, regulators and employees--to the highest standards of operation at TMI, and we are making sure our corrective actions are comprehensive and permanent," Langenbach said.

The violations were identified by NRC during five different inspections conducted between November 1996 and May 1997. One of those inspections was an in-depth design inspection; TMI-1 was one of six power plants selected by NRC for such a review, which the agency decided to conduct after design basis issues were raised at Northeast Utilities' Millstone

nuclear plant. It was in the course of that inspection at the 870 megawatt reactor that NRC identified inadequate engineering design controls, including incorrect inputs for certain design basis calculations, inadequate verifications to ensure designs would work as intended and inadequate safety evaluations prior to making design changes.

GPU Nuclear says it has improved the way it documents and maintains plant design information to assure that the information is translated accurately into plant procedures and modifications.

NRC also cited GPU for inadequate implementation of the plant's emergency preparedness program. Specifically, during the plant's emergency exercise March 5, the emergency director failed to declare a general emergency--the highest of four emergency classifications when such a step was warranted, NRC said.

[See related story, page 2.]

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Three Mile Island Alert

Three Mile Island Alert (TMIA) is a non-profit citizens' organization dedicated to the promotion of safe-energy alternatives to nuclear power, especially the Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

Formed in 1977 after the construction and licensing of TMI Unit-1 and the construction of the infamous Unit-2, TMIA is the largest and oldest safe-energy group in central Pennsylvania.

TMIA members interested in specific aspects of nuclear power are encouraged to join one of TMIA's committees. These committees include:

- Radiation Monitoring
- Low-level Radioactive Waste
- Health Effects of TMI
- Nuclear Plant Security

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NRC Wants GPUN To Be Aggressive in Sizing Up Accident Dangers

from an August 4, 1997, Inside NRC article

NRC officials want GPU Nuclear Corp.'s (GPUN) staff at Three Mile Island to be "less conservative and more aggressive in sizing up the situation" when it comes to emergency response plans. GPUN representatives met with NRC staff July 25 to update the staff on what the utility has done since a March 5 emergency drill triggered an NRC confirmatory action letter (CAL). During the drill, the GPUN emergency response organization (ERO) failed to declare a general emergency when plant conditions warranted such a call (INRC, 17 March, 5).

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said, at the time, that members of the ERO team were too focused on the process, on doing things "by the book" and following procedures. He said they didn't realize a general emergency should have been declared until the drill was over. "Given TMI's history, it's not something we want to see happen," Sheehan said. TMI was the site of the country's worst nuclear power plant accident in 1979.

In the CAL, NRC Region I Administrator Hubert Miller said the ERO failed to "initiate protective action recommendations to off-site officials for residents outside the 10-mile emergency planning zone when dose projections appeared to indicate that protective action guidelines would be exceeded." He also criticized the ERO for not thoroughly analyzing simulated

accident conditions.

Charles Hehl, NRC Region I director of the division of reactor projects, said GPUN was "five or 10 steps behind the curve" during the ill-fated drill. The emergency planning director "needed to demonstrate a better job of keeping up with realities," Hehl said. He added GPUN must "make sure the accident scenario is proactive in identifying and dealing with problems."

According to Laura Karinch, GPUN spokeswoman, the company's corrective actions have been aggressive. Drill participants were interviewed. The utility retrained the entire ERO to ensure members understand the expectations and responsibilities involved in recommending protective action for areas 10 miles or more away from the plant.

Karinch said improvements also were made in the dose projection outputs so doses could be more easily determined beyond the 10-mile limit. On April 25, GPUN met with Pennsylvania officials to review GPUN's dose assessment process. GPUN conducted a remedial exercise May 13.

TMI-1 Ends Operating Cycle That Included Record Run

from a September 11, 1997, Nucleonics Week article

GPU Nuclear's Three Mile Island-1 shut September 5 for eight weeks of refueling and maintenance, after 23 months of operation that included a record-setting continuous run.

GPU Nuclear employees and about 1,000 contract workers from Raytheon Nuclear, Inc. will put in some 180,000 hours of outage work, GPU Nuclear spokeswoman Laura Karinch said. All 177 fuel assemblies will be removed from the core and inspected, and about one third will be replaced. Other planned work includes inspection of about 30,000 tubes in the plant's two once-through steam generators, and maintenance on 30 control rods and three of the plant's four 9,000-horsepower reactor coolant pumps.

TMI-1 ran continuously for 616 days and 23 hours, breaking the 616-day 7-hour continuous run record for LWRs set in 1993-95 by Consolidated Edison's Indian Point-2. It scrambled June 21 on an overheated circuit breaker, and returned after just 182 hours of downtime.

This is TMI-1's twelfth refueling and maintenance outage. The unit began operating in 1974 and is licensed until 2014. [Editor's note: TMI-1 resumed full power on October 21, 1997.]

GPU to Sell All Generation Assets Totaling 5,300 MW

from an October 20, 1997, The Energy Report article

The Parsippany, N.J., based utility holding company said last week that it will sell its 34 New Jersey and Pennsylvania fossil-fired and hydroelectric power plants. The facilities have a combined capacity of 5,300 MW and a book value of \$1.1 billion, according to GPU.

"Our business thrust is not to be in the generation business," said a GPU spokesperson. "We're not big enough, and we don't see ourselves with the wherewithal to become big enough."

GPU isn't interested in "using our resources to expand our generation capability enough to be a successful competitor in the merchant generation business," GPU Chair Fred Hafer said. The utility will decide how to handle its nuclear capacity separately.

The auction should take about a year to complete after state and federal regulatory approval. Goldman, Sachs has been hired to advise GPU on the process. Some of the money from the sale will go toward the \$1.88 billion GPU also said last week it will spend to buy PowerNet Victoria, an Australian high-voltage electrical transmission company. [See related story, page 9.]

The utility owns two nuclear plants -- Oyster Creek and the infamous

Three Mile Island. In April, GPU announced plans to sell the older Oyster Creek plant. Then it said it might include Three Mile Island as a package deal. Earlier this month, there was speculation that Peco Energy and Duke Energy, the nation's largest power plant operators, could be potential buyers. Peco has teamed with British Energy to form AmerGen expressly to buy nuclear plants in the United States.

TMI Contractor Supervisor Has Positive Drug Test

from an August 18, 1997, Inside NRC article

A contractor supervisor at GPU Nuclear Corp.'s Three Mile Island (TMI) tested positive for a controlled substance last week and was escorted from the site. Plant spokeswoman Mary Wells would not identify the drug or drugs thought to have been used. She said the contractor worked for Raytheon Nuclear of Philadelphia and had access to the entire plant. A positive drug test from someone on the supervisory level "is very unusual," Wells said.

Wells said that a positive drug test for TMI employees results in suspension, not immediate termination. "We don't just turn them out on the street. We offer an employee assistance program. If they have a drug problem and show a good-faith effort to be rehabilitated, we give them that opportunity," she said.

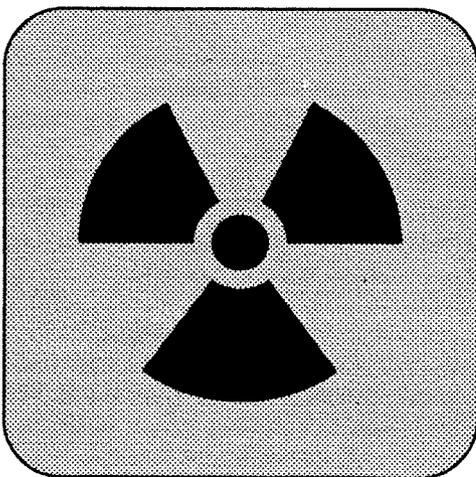
Ohio Dumps Its Radioactive Waste Dump

from the June 1997 The Nuclear Monitor (NIRS)

After spending \$3.2 million on siting a low-level radioactive waste dump, the Midwest Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Commission voted 5-0 on June 29 to end its quest to site a radioactive waste dump in Ohio, or anywhere else.

The Midwest compact had been working for 12 years to site a low level dump, first in Michigan, then in Ohio. Michigan was kicked out of the compact in 1991 when it stated that it couldn't find an appropriate site for a dump. The compact, composed of Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Indiana, then picked Ohio as the dumpstate.

But more than 100 communities in Ohio passed resolutions against becoming dumpsites, and opponents were collecting thousands of signatures on petitions for a referendum which would have barred Ohio from becoming a multi-state dumpsite.



Groups Dispose of Lots of Money but No Radioactive Waste

from a July 7, 1997, St. Louis Post-Dispatch article

Regional compacts Congress created 17 years ago to bury low-level radioactive waste have spent hundreds of millions of dollars with virtually nothing to show for it. Not one of the 10 multistate compacts has opened a new dump in that time. And none of the five states that opted to go it alone plans to build one.

The seven states in the Southeast compact were to have opened a dump in North Carolina four years ago; the most recently revised target date is 2001. Opponents and regulators worry that the chosen site lies too near water and that radioactivity could leach into drinking supplies.

Indeed, radioactivity remains a rallying point throughout the country, with critics often linking the dump sites to the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island nuclear plant disasters.

Charles Hawkins, a Virginia state senator and a member of the Southeast Compact Commission, suggests the real problem is a lack of political will to find a way, and a place, for disposal.

The Midwest compact, which includes Missouri, made a decision last month - to opt out of the entire dump idea and look for another disposal solution. It reasoned that less radioactive waste was being produced and the dumps in Utah

and South Carolina could handle what there was. Together, the compacts have already spent \$400 million - on research, planning and site acquisition - without a single new repository up and running. The Northwest compact uses 100 acres on the nuclear reservation in Hanford, Wash., but only four others have even chosen sites.

The estimated cost to finish the projects has risen past \$1 billion, far over the amount projected when Congress created the system in 1980. An early estimate for the Southeast compact's dump, for example, was less than \$100 million, but estimates now stand at \$216 million. Estimates for the five-state Central compact now approach \$154 million, up from the original \$31 million.

Meantime, most low-level wastes are being temporarily stored wherever they are generated, or shipped to the three existing repositories: private dumps in South Carolina and Utah and a corner of the federal reservation in Hanford.

There is no federal oversight of the cumbersome compact process because Congress wanted states to solve their own waste problems. "The problem from the start was there was no set time frame for anything," Hawkins says. "It was driven by the politics of the day, and the first rule of politics is you never make a decision until you have to."

NRC Proposes \$80,000 Civil Penalty, Bars Two Former Workers for Records Falsification at Limerick Nuclear Plant

from an August 6, 1997, NRC press release

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed an \$80,000 fine against PECO Energy Company for multiple examples of records falsification at the Limerick nuclear power plant in Limerick, Pa. In tandem with that action, the agency has issued orders prohibiting two of the former workers involved from taking part in NRC-licensed activities for several years.

PECO Energy, which operates the two-reactor plant near Philadelphia, first identified and investigated two incidents in which records were wrongly filled out and reported them to the NRC. Subsequently, the NRC's Office of Investigations conducted two separate investigations and concluded that records required by the NRC to be maintained had in fact been falsified.

In one of the cases, a chemistry technician and a former chemist at the plant, at the direction of a former chemistry manager, deliberately falsified a record of the time a sample was taken from the Reactor Enclosure Cooling Water System.

Plant technical specifications require that, with a radiation monitor inoperable, at least one sample be taken from the system at least once every 24 hours. On February 7, 1996, the sample was taken about one hour and 15 minutes late. However, the record was altered to indicate the sample was taken within

the 24-hour period.

Under orders issued by the NRC, the former chemistry manager and chemist have been banned from activities licensed by the agency for five and three years, respectively. Both workers have been dismissed by the company.

The other case involved several occasions between April 3, 1995 and July 29, 1996 on which the records for required fire protection tests were falsified. Specifically, a fire protection technical assistant deliberately failed to properly perform a fire hose visual inspection surveillance test but stated in a document that the test had been carried out. Further, the worker deliberately failed to perform other such tests yet wrongly filled out the related documents to show that he had done so. Also, the employee failed to enter a specific area necessary to complete a fire suppression water system spray and sprinkler visual inspection, even though he signed documents indicating the task had been successfully completed.

NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller, in a letter to PECO Energy, wrote that not performing required activities, yet documenting on records that the activities were carried out, constitutes a "significant regulatory concern." In addition, Mr. Miller expressed concern as to whether plant staffers were fearful

of discussing problems when they occurred.

"The NRC has previously issued documents emphasizing the importance of maintaining complete and accurate records of activities performed, such as in NRC Information Notice 92-30, issued on April 23, 1992, and NRC Generic Letter 93-03, issued on October 20, 1993. Those documents describe similar occurrences at other facilities," Mr. Miller stated.

"While the NRC is clearly concerned with the individuals who engaged in these activities at Limerick, the NRC is also concerned whether the situation involving the Primary Chemistry Manager is evidence that there have been at least pockets at Limerick where staff was fearful of raising problems when they occurred, notwithstanding generally strong corrective action processes at the site."

PECO Energy has 30 days to pay the fine or to request in writing that all or part of the penalty be withdrawn.

NRC Proposes \$210,000 Fine for Pennsylvania Utility for Several Alleged Violations at Susquehanna Plant

from a July 23, 1997, NRC press release

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a \$210,000 fine against Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. for several alleged violations of agency guidelines at the utility's Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Berwick, Pa. The alleged infractions fall into two major areas: the misalignment of a circuit breaker for an emergency diesel generator that left it inoperable, and plant operators' repeated failure to detect this problem; and the improper deactivation of a containment isolation valve.

With respect to the emergency diesel generator alleged violations, commercial nuclear power plants are required to have multiple backup energy sources so that in the event of a loss of power, the reactor can be safely shutdown. Susquehanna, which has two reactors, is required to have four emergency diesel generators available for that purpose. Nevertheless, on June 14, 1996, non-licensed plant operators failed to detect a misalignment of a diesel generator auxiliary equipment supply breaker, which rendered that generator inoperable. The problem was not identified during three subsequent weekly equipment checks. All told, the generator was out of service for almost three weeks. However, in their equipment test records, the operators incorrectly reported that the circuit

breaker was in the appropriate position.

Further, alarm tests that were supposed to have been done during rounds by the non-licensed operators were listed as having been performed when in many cases that did not occur. The operators failed to perform the required panel alarm tests on approximately 157 occasions between January and June 1996.

Given the number of individuals involved, the actual and potential impact on equipment, the duration of the problem and the lack of management and supervisory oversight that resulted in the failure to detect this widespread condition, the NRC is classifying these alleged violations in the aggregate as a Severity Level II problem, which constitutes a very significant regulatory concern.

According to the NRC, "[t]his case represents particularly poor licensee performance, as evidenced by 1.) the nature of the violations associated with the Severity Level II problem, including the inoperability of the diesel generator for almost three weeks and the number of employees involved; 2.) the extensiveness of the problem with inaccurate records; and 3.) the management and supervisory failures demonstrated by these violations.

Regarding the improper valve deactivation alleged violation, on July 30, 1996, a containment isolation valve was opened and deactivated for 24 hours, rendering the valve inoperable. The valve had been deactivated for preventive maintenance work but without the proper actions taken to comply with the plant's technical specification requirements.

The problem was significant because PP&L's incorrect interpretation of requirements would have allowed the valve to remain inoperable and open indefinitely. A fine of \$50,000 has been proposed for that alleged violation.

A third alleged violation which was cited but for which no fine has been proposed involved a non-licensed operator's failure to follow administrative procedures for controlling the status of equipment associated with the Standby Liquid Control System. The system's purpose is to shutdown the reactor during an emergency by injecting a neutron-absorbing solution into it via the core spray system. On June 12, 1996, the operator repositioned a breaker switch, resulting in the de-energization of heat tracing for an operable standby liquid control pump for 34 hours.

Radioactive Materials Released into the Marketplace

from an October 7, 1997, NIRS press release

What do radioactive frying pans, zippers, dental braces on your kid's teeth, belt buckles, jewelry, and tableware have to do with nuclear bomb factories? The United States government is now converting old radioactive machinery left over from nuclear bomb factories into everyday items that will expose the

public, unknowingly and repeatedly, to radiation. The Department of Energy (DOE) has just signed on to a precedent-setting contract with private companies including BNFL, a subsidiary of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, that guarantees the company a profit on sales of the radioactively contaminated metal to the

marketplace. As of the signing of the contract, title to the federally-owned radioactive metal waste was shifted to BNFL. Once stripped from the radioactive buildings, the radioactive metal will be transported to privately owned, state-licensed companies who will process and sell it on the open market. The scrap could be used for cars, I-beams of buildings, anything made with stainless steel. BNFL already has plans for a contract with a company (Ovonics) that makes nickel metal hydride batteries which could end up in items such as scooters, cars, computers and toys.

As atomic reactors and weapons factories close, decommissioning begins. There is an imminent danger that radioactive metal is and will be released into circulation. The amount of contaminated metal entering the marketplace is on the verge of a dramatic, exponential increase.

The threat comes from two directions:

First, there are specific contracts such as the DOE and BNFL deal to decommission parts of the immense bomb complex. This contract at Oak Ridge, Tennessee is both dangerous and a warning knell of more such contracts to come at Oak Ridge and across the country.

Second, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and US Nuclear Regulatory Commission

(Continued on bottom of page 11)

PA DEP Encourages Homeowners to Test for Radon

from an October 1, 1997 PR Newswire article

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary James M. Seif today urged all Pennsylvanians to test their homes for radon, an invisible gas that's the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. "High levels of radon have been detected in all 67 Pennsylvania counties," Seif said. "Testing is easy, inexpensive and the only way to know if your home has a radon problem."

Radon gas is produced from the natural breakdown of trace amounts of uranium in the soil. It seeps into homes through cracks in the foundation or walls, construction joints -- even through the water supply. Radon is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L). The federal government's action level (or level at which steps should be taken to reduce radon) is 4 pCi/L.

A 1989 study by DEP and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 40 percent of Pennsylvania homes have radon levels greater than 4 pCi/L,

compared with the national average of just six percent. In fact, radon readings of greater than 20 pCi/L have been found in all 67 Pennsylvania counties and readings topping 100 pCi/L (or 25 times the action level) have been found in 60 of 67 counties.

The most common test for radon is a do-it-yourself, short-term charcoal canister test that's available for around \$20 at most hardware and home-improvement stores. Homeowners can also hire a state-certified company or individual to do the testing. People are encouraged to use devices or testing companies that are certified to perform radon testing or mitigation work in Pennsylvania.

More information about radon and certification is available by calling DEP's Radon Hotline 1-800-23-RADON, or by visiting the DEP web site at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose Information by Subject/Radiation Protection/Radon).

NRC Staff Rates Susquehanna "Good" in Three Areas, Superior in Fourth Area of Latest Assessment

from a September 30, 1997, NRC press release

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has rated the Susquehanna nuclear power plant as "good" in operations, maintenance and engineering, and "superior" in plant support in the latest Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) of the facility. The plant is located in Berwick, Pa., and is operated by PP&L, Inc. The assessment covers the period from August 6, 1995, through August 16 of this year.

Four functional areas of nuclear power plant performance are rated in NRC SALP reports: plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. Ratings of Category 1 ("superior"), Category 2 ("good"), and Category 3 ("acceptable") are assigned.

In Susquehanna's previous SALP (which assessed the facility from February 27, 1994, through August 5, 1995), it was rated "superior" in all four areas.

"Operations management demonstrated a conservative approach to operation of the plant," wrote Hubert J. Miller, NRC Region I administrator, in a letter to PP&L. "In general, operations management responded aggressively to events to ensure operability and reliability of systems. However, some significant failures of licensed and non-licensed nuclear plant

operators, to perform and document required equipment checks and inspections raised fundamental questions about the adequacy of supervisory oversight and communication of management expectations."

Concerning maintenance, Mr. Miller said: "Management oversight and involvement in response to high profile maintenance activities resulted in good corrective actions. However, human performance errors of consequence increased during this assessment period that resulted in equipment challenges including two reactor scrams [automatic shutdowns] and a reactor recirculation system runback."

Regarding engineering, Mr. Miller said: "[T]he quality of safety evaluations and operability evaluations remain a weakness that has continued from the last SALP period. In addition, several longstanding design and licensing basis issues were either not identified and/or properly corrected."

In the area of plant support, Mr. Miller said: "Overall, the performance in radiological controls was excellent as evidenced by extensive planning and effective implementation of radiological controls for outage work."



NewsNotes

☞ *Before the Big Bang: The Origins of the Universe*, by Ernest Sternglass, Ph.D. In his latest book, Sternglass discusses the nature of the "primeval atom," as he conducts a brief tour of modern physics and cosmology. And he recounts his firsthand exchanges with scientific greats such as Albert Einstein, Louis de Broglie, Niels Bohr, and Richard Feynman.

☞ **1998 Peace Calendar on Sale.** Once again, TMIA is offering the Syracuse Cultural Workers' Peace Calendar. This 27th edition of the Peace Calendar honors people's history with months on the Iroquois influence on early feminists, the 75th anniversary of the War Resisters League, Paul Robeson, the 1981 Women's Pentagon Action, and Jewish labor history in Chicago. The price is \$10, plus \$1.50 postage and handling. Call TMIA at 717-233-7897 to order, or write us at 315 Peffer Street, Harrisburg PA 17102.

☞ TMIA is happy to announce we have a World-Wide Web Site and an email address. Point your browser to:
<http://www.envirolink.org/orgs/tmia>
 or email us at tmia@pipeline.com.

NRC Rates Peach Bottom as "Superior" in Three Areas, "Good" in Fourth, in Agency's Latest Assessment of Plant's Performance

from a July 18, 1997, NRC press release

The Peach Bottom nuclear power plant has garnered performance ratings of "superior" for operations, maintenance and plant support and "good" for engineering in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff's latest Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) report for the facility. The two-reactor plant is located in Delta (York County), Pa., and is operated by PECO Energy Company.

The assessment covers the period from October 15, 1996 through June of this year.

Four functional areas of nuclear power plant performance are rated in NRC SALP reports: plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. Ratings of Category 1 ("superior"), 2 ("good") or 3 ("acceptable") are assigned.

Peach Bottom's latest ratings are the same as those it received during the previous assessment period.

"The areas of operations and maintenance were rated Category 1 as a result of strong management oversight, excellent personnel performance, good planning and effective work control," NRC Region 1 Administrator Hubert J. Miller wrote in a letter to the utility regarding the report.

NRC staff found that in the area of operations, plant operators responded to problems in an outstanding manner and that actions to reduce operator attention-to-detail errors were effective. Regarding maintenance, the agency noted that personnel generally performed well, demonstrating good knowledge and good use of procedures.

"The area of plant support was also rated Category 1 with continued overall effectiveness of radiation protection, emergency preparedness, fire protection and security activities," Mr. Miller continued.

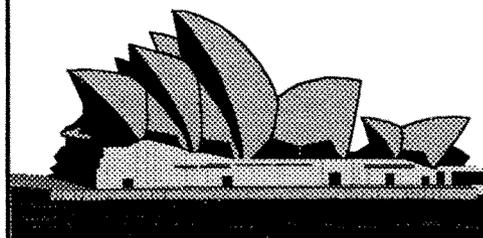
Engineering received a Category 2 rating because while overall performance in that area was good, there were several instances in which operating procedures, surveillances and tests were not consistent with the plant's design and licensing bases, or operational blueprints. Addressing that area, Mr. Miller stated that even though the material condition of equipment generally remained excellent, "some balance of plant equipment problems challenged operators, indicating continuing attention to equipment performance is needed. Also we found problems with the development and management oversight of efforts to implement the maintenance rule program."

GPU Announces Acquisition of Australian Company

from an October 12, 1997, PR Newswire article

GPU, Inc., announced today that the Australian State of Victoria has named it the winning bidder for PowerNet, the state's electrical transmission company. The purchase price is \$1.88 billion. GPU, continuing its focus on its core delivery business, separately announced that it intends to begin a process that would lead to the sale of up to all of its non-nuclear generation assets through an auction. [See related story, page 3.]

Referring to the Australian purchase, Fred D. Hafer, GPU chairman, president and CEO, said, "The PowerNet acquisition further implements our strategy of expanding our ongoing efforts to grow our core infrastructure business in new markets. The purchase also better positions GPU to participate further in the Australian market."



NRC Reverses Potassium Iodide Stockpiling Policy

from a July 11, 1997, The Energy Daily article

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has reversed its longstanding policy on potassium iodide stockpiling, saying it is not such a bad idea after all. Laissez-faire best describes NRC's traditional approach to the distribution of potassium iodide (KI), which when taken in pill form shortly after a severe nuclear accident, can stop the thyroid gland from taking up radiation.

Despite the recommendation of a presidential commission appointed in the wake of the Three Mile Island accident that states be required to stockpile the pills, which cost only pennies to produce, commission policy since 1985 has been to allow states to decide whether to stockpile KI. NRC neither discourages nor encourages its use.

Not all commissioners have agreed with this policy, however. Kenneth Rogers, whose second five-year term on the commission expired June 30, has fought vigorously over the years to make KI stockpiling mandatory and federally funded. His persistence paid off last week when NRC reversed its position. While stopping short of requiring mandatory stockpiling of the drug, NRC said it will pay for KI for states that request it.

Nuclear activists, like Public Citizen's Bill Magavern, hailed the decision, calling it "long overdue." Still, Magavern said NRC's new stockpiling policy does not go far

enough. "It should be made mandatory. NRC is taking a strange, partial step in the right direction," he said. "It's kind of a mixed decision," he added, pointing out that the reversal is more so a function of politics and pragmatism than of a bona fide change of heart by NRC.



What changed are the circumstances: The Federal Radiological Preparedness Coordinating Committee (FRPCC) already has begun stockpiling the drug to make it available to any state for any type of radiological emergency at any time. FRPCC, which has responsibility for peacetime emergency radiological planning, has begun stockpiling KI in response to a 1995 presidential counterterrorism directive instructing federal agencies to reduce vulnerability to the potential use by terrorists of nuclear,

biological and chemical weapons. As part of that directive, KI will be made available at states' request, along with a number of other chemical nerve gas antidotes, vaccines for anthrax, antibiotics and other medicines for use by the general public in the event of a terrorist attack.

In endorsing the FRPCC position, NRC agreed to foot the bill to stockpile KI, at a cost of up to \$1.3 million in the first year, depending on how many states request it. The drug subsequently will need to be repurchased every seven years. Under NRC's revised position, the federal government would purchase the KI, but interested state and local governments still would be responsible for maintenance, distribution and subsequent costs.

Magavern said he is concerned that without a federal mandate for KI stockpiling, the nuclear industry simply will shift its fight against the policy to the state and local levels. Steve Unglesbee, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute, said the industry is comfortable with stockpiling KI along with a range of other medicines designed to mitigate terrorist acts, but that it still does not agree the drug should be mandatory in conjunction with domestic reactor operations.

Model Potassium Iodide program

by Scott Portzline, TMLA Planning Council

This outline by Three Mile Island Alert may prove helpful to your legislators.

Securing a Supply of Potassium Iodide (KI) for Protection of the Public During a Nuclear Accident

1. The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission is now funding the supply of Potassium Iodide to prevent the uptake of radioactive iodine by people who would otherwise be exposed during a nuclear accident.

2. The Problem -- During a nuclear accident, radioactive iodine is absorbed by the thyroid gland.

3. The Solution -- Ingesting Potassium Iodide before exposure prevents the uptake of the radioactive iodine.

4. States and local governments can request funding by the NRC to secure a supply of Potassium

Iodide.

5. States and/or local governments must arrange for the distribution of the supply.

6. Potassium Iodide is already available to emergency responders (TMI supplies the City of Harrisburg).

7. Potassium Iodide must be immediately available (using it after exposure is useless). (The shipment sent to the Harrisburg area during the TMI accident was never distributed because it was too late.)

8. There may be a few adverse reactions to ingesting Potassium Iodide when given to hundreds-of-thousands of people.

9. Potassium Iodide no longer has a

limited shelf life. The issue of limited shelf life essentially has been resolved by new encapsulation technology.

10. A member of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards confirms that Potassium Iodide distribution should be considered as a "defense in depth" issue.

11. The National Thyroid Association supports the stockpiling and pre-distribution of Potassium Iodide.

12. The City of Harrisburg has indicated an interest in working with legislators to develop a model program.

13. Three Mile Island Alert is urging legislation to secure a supply for the entire state of Pennsylvania.

(Continued from page 7)

(NRC) are in various stages of rolling out the red carpet for these unacceptable practices, legalizing release of radioactive metal, other materials (plastic, concrete, etc.) and properties from regulated control. This is despite the public's consistent previous objections to such dangerous, irreversible policies. The most recent policies are suspected to have originated or been sanctioned in closed-door meetings of federal agencies (the Interagency Steering Committee on Radiation Standards) which operates in secrecy reminiscent in

some ways of the Manhattan Project. DOE is already releasing and the EPA is developing standards to justify unrestricted radioactive releases into the public domain. NRC's highly objectionable rule setting allowable radioactive levels for buildings and property to be released has already been finalized.

Since the BNFL contract involves subcontracting to metal processors that are licensed by the state, the release of radioactivity is being permitted through Tennessee's authority as an "Agreement State"

with the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Essentially, state-level regulators from one of the most nuclear states in the country, are setting defacto standard, using loopholes and exemptions, for routine contamination of the unsuspecting public.

"The government regulators are completely selling out and setting the stage for irreversible contamination of the planet. We made a big mistake creating this mess. There is absolutely no justification for spreading it around

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NRC Underestimates Threat of Terrorism

by Scott Portzline, TMLA Planning Council

Transporting high-level nuclear waste represents a new opportunity for terrorists. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) analyses of terrorist attack against the transportation of spent fuel are inadequate. The studies were performed in the 1970s and 1980s and no longer reflect the capabilities of weapons available to terrorists.

The Nuclear Waste Project Office for the State of Nevada found:

"1. NRC underestimated the potential damage to the cask and its spent fuel as a result of an attack with explosives. The full-scale test conducted by DOE did not use weaponry equivalent to the currently best available armor-piercing weapons. NRC underestimated the damage and subsequent release of an attack using more than one weapon. The casks being designed today for future shipments have thinner walls and four-times larger payloads. NRC acknowledged that spent fuel subjected to higher burn-up (e.g., fuel that has been irradiated longer and consequently contains higher concentrations of certain radionuclides) would result in 45 percent greater consequences.

"2. NRC underestimated the potential health effects of an attack resulting in a release. The NRC analysis did not adequately assess

health effects, especially health effects other than cancers, from the release of larger-than-respirable particles of spent fuel or from direct radiation resulting from loss of cask shielding. Such effects could be especially important for emergency response, law enforcement, and recovery and cleanup personnel. The NRC analysis did not specifically consider health effects for especially vulnerable members of the public such as pregnant women and unborn children.

"3. NRC did not evaluate the standard economic impacts of an attack resulting in a release. The NRC economic impact analysis did not consider the cost of securing the scene of the attack, recovering and removing the damaged cask, and cleaning up and disposing of all radioactive materials released by the attack. In certain locations, these costs could be high even for a very small amount of radioactive material released. NRC also ignored potential economic losses suffered by businesses in the vicinity of an attack.

"4. NRC did not evaluate the special economic impacts of an attack resulting in a release. From the standpoint of socioeconomic impacts, the NRC's single most significant finding was that a successful terrorist attack could actually breach a cask and cause a release of materials. For assessing economic and social impacts driven

by public perception of risk and stigma, the amount of radioactive material released is less important than the credible possibility of a release in the event of an attack. NRC did not evaluate the economic and social impacts of such an attack or the impacts of public fear of an attack."

Anti-Tank and Armor Piercing Weapons Pose Major Threat

"There are serious questions about how well past NRC and DOE tests simulated the effects of weapons currently available for possible use by a terrorist group. Guerrilla armies around the world are known to be equipped with older anti-armor missiles such as the Soviet RPG-7 and the American M72. Such weapons may be considered obsolete relative to modern battle tank armor. However, with the ability to penetrate up to 10 - 14 inches of armor plate, they could pose a considerable threat to a nuclear waste shipping cask. Terrorists could conceivably obtain one of the dozen or more anti-tank weapons currently capable of penetrating 12 - 30 inches of tank armor."

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and letting a few sloppy nuclear companies make a bundle out of the scrubbing, smelting and selling it in the open market," charged Diane D'Arrigo of Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS).

"Unwitting consumers are subsidizing decommissioning costs as hunks of radioactive machinery and metal shielding are transformed into dinnerware and swingsets."

This raises some serious questions for the public: Will mothers need to take geiger counters with them when shopping for children's toys? How will you know if the metal used to make your child's orthodontic braces have traces of radioactive contamination from nuclear bomb factories?

The sole-source, noncompetitive contract between BNFL and DOE, signed in late August 1997, to decommission three huge uranium enrichment factories at the Oak Ridge, Tennessee nuclear reservation will cost an estimated \$300 million and result in the release of an estimated 112,000 tons of radioactive nickel, copper, aluminum and steel scrap into commerce in the US and abroad. Once out into general use, the radioactive metal can be recycled, reused and resmelted over and over, disseminating radioactivity and multiplying exposures to the public and workers in any encounter with metal objects.

This large-scale release of radioactive metal into the public domain is being done in violation of the basic scientific and

internationally accepted principles that there is no safe level of exposure to ionizing radioactivity and that exposures should be minimized and prevented. There will be no protection of the public, no warning, no notification, no verification of individual and multiple exposures.

"This is the tip of the iceberg--a horrifying, precedent-setting contract to spread radioactivity from nuclear weapons production into our daily lives," stated D'Arrigo. "And there will be more to follow at Oak Ridge, other atomic weapons sites and from nuclear power reactors from repairs and closures."



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