

August 10, 2011

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Energy  
and Water Development  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Feinstein:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of April 20, 2011, requesting an expansion of the range of issues that are addressed during the nuclear power reactor license renewal process. Specifically, you requested that the NRC examine “seismic and tsunami hazards, operational issues, plant security, emergency preparedness, spent fuel storage options and other elements of a nuclear power plant’s ‘design basis’ within the scope of the relicensing process.”

The NRC often reviews and revises its regulations, including those related to license renewal, in light of new information. Prior to publishing our current license renewal regulations, the NRC examined a number of issues that could be addressed in the license renewal process. The Commission determined that, with the exception of age-related degradation of certain passive, long-lived systems, structures, and components (SSCs), the NRC’s existing regulatory process is adequate to ensure that the licensing bases of all currently operating plants maintain public safety and security. The Commission considered whether or not to include emergency planning, security, and other topics, but determined that the existing regulatory process was sufficient. Those topics currently are considered on an ongoing basis in connection with the NRC’s oversight of operating reactors, so that any matter of significance would be evaluated promptly rather than waiting for a licensee to apply for license renewal. For example, the Commission is currently considering changes to emergency preparedness regulations that, if approved, would be applied to all facilities, both in their initial term of operation as well as during the term of renewal.

Following the events in Japan, the Commission established a task force to conduct a near-term review of recent events in Japan and to recommend issues for additional analysis and/or regulation over a longer term. The topics you cite are among those being examined by the task force or are otherwise under active review within the agency. If at any time during this process it is determined that the Commission’s regulations should be further examined and potentially revised, the agency will promptly undertake such an examination.

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We appreciate hearing your views and thank you for your interest in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me or Ms. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

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Gregory B. Jaczko