February 29, 2000

Mr. J. B. Beasley, Jr.
Vice President
Southern Nuclear Operating
  Company, Inc.
Post Office Box 1295
Birmingham, Alabama 35201-1295

SUBJECT: VOGTLE ELECTRIC GENERATING PLANT, UNITS 1 AND 2 RE: SITE-SPECIFIC WORKSHEETS FOR USE IN THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION'S SIGNIFICANCE DETERMINATION PROCESS (TAC NO. MA6544)

Dear Mr. Beasley:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with one of the key implementation tools to be used by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in the revised reactor oversight process, which is currently expected to be implemented at Vogtle Electric Generating Plant, Units 1 and 2 (Vogtle) in April 2000. Included in the enclosed Risk-Informed Inspection Notebooks are the Significance Determination Process (SDP) worksheets that inspectors will be using to risk-characterize inspection findings. The SDP is discussed in more detail below.

On January 8, 1999, the NRC staff described to the Commission plans and recommendations to improve the reactor oversight process in SECY-99-007, "Recommendations for Reactor Oversight Process Improvements." SECY-99-007 is available on the NRC's web site at www.nrc.gov/NRC/COMMISSION/SECYS/index.html. The new process, developed with stakeholder involvement, is designed around a risk-informed framework, which is intended to focus both the NRC's and licensee's attention and resources on those issues of more risk significance.

The performance assessment portion of the new process involves the use of both licensee-submitted performance indicator data and inspection findings that have been appropriately categorized based on their risk significance. In order to properly categorize an inspection finding, the NRC has developed the SDP. This process was described to the Commission in SECY-99-007A, "Recommendations for Reactor Oversight Process Improvements (Follow-up to SECY-99-007)," dated March 22, 1999, also available at the same NRC web site noted above.

The SDP for power operations involves evaluating an inspection finding's impact on the plant's capability: to limit the frequency of initiating events; to ensure the availability, reliability, and capability of mitigating systems; and to ensure the integrity of the fuel cladding, reactor coolant system, and containment barriers. As described in SECY-99-007A, the SDP involves the use of three tables. Table 1 is the estimated likelihood for initiating event occurrence during the degraded period. Table 2 describes how the significance is determined based on remaining mitigation system capabilities. Table 3 provides the bases for the failure probabilities associated with the remaining mitigation equipment and strategies.

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Ramin Assa, Project Manager, Section 1
Project Directorate II
Division of Licensing Project Management
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket Nos. 5

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