

Mr. Samuel L. Newton
Vice President, Operations
Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation
185 Old Ferry Road
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

SUBJECT: PLANT PERFORMANCE REVIEW - VERMONT YANKEE

Dear Mr. Newton:

The purpose of this letter is to communicate our assessment of your performance and to inform you of our planned inspections at your facility. On February 23, 2000, we completed a Plant Performance Review (PPR) of Vermont Yankee. We conduct these reviews to develop an integrated overview of the safety performance of each operating nuclear power plant. We use the results of the PPR in planning and allocating inspection resources and as inputs to our senior management meeting (SMM) process. This PPR evaluated inspection results and safety performance information for the period from January 16, 1999 to January 31, 2000, but emphasized the last six months to ensure that our assessment reflected your current performance. Our most recent summary of plant performance at Vermont Yankee was provided to you in a letter dated April 9, 1999.

The NRC has been developing a revised reactor oversight process that will replace our existing inspection and assessment processes, including the PPR, the SMM, and the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP). We recently completed a pilot program for the revised reactor oversight process at nine participating sites and are making necessary adjustments based on feedback and lessons learned. We plan to begin initial implementation of the revised reactor oversight process industry-wide on April 2, 2000.

This PPR reflects continued NRC process improvements as we make the transition into the revised reactor oversight process. You will notice that the following summary of plant performance is organized differently from our previous performance summaries. Instead of characterizing our assessment results by SALP functional area, we are organizing the results into the strategic performance areas embodied in the revised reactor oversight process. In addition, we have considered the historical performance indicator data that you submitted in January 2000 in conjunction with the inspection results in assessing your performance. The results of this PPR were used to establish the inspection plan in accordance with the new risk-informed inspection program (consisting of baseline and supplemental inspections). Although this letter incorporates some terms and concepts associated with the new oversight process, it does not reflect the much broader changes in inspection and assessment that will be evident after we have fully implemented our revised reactor oversight process.

During the last six months of the assessment period, Vermont Yankee operated at or near full power except for one unscheduled power reduction and a refueling and maintenance outage.

We identified no significant performance issues in any of the strategic performance areas (reactor safety, radiation safety, and safeguards) during this assessment period and note that Vermont Yankee continues to operate in a safe manner. Therefore, we currently plan to conduct only our normal baseline inspections at your facility as noted in the attached inspection plan.

In the reactor safety strategic area, we noted that you effectively addressed previously identified weaknesses in the corrective action process. Program changes and increased emphasis on personnel accountability have resulted in timely identification and proper handling of degraded conditions. You also successfully resolved past problems with control of contractors. Through other initiatives, you reduced the number of human performance errors and improved your maintenance performance and programs, although we noted that some informal work practices still persist.

Additionally, we did not identify any significant performance issues in the radiation safety or safeguards strategic performance areas.

Enclosure 1 contains a historical listing of plant issues, referred to as the Plant Issues Matrix (PIM), that were used during this PPR process to arrive at our integrated view of your performance trends. The PIM for this assessment is grouped by the prior SALP functional areas of operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support, although the future PIM will be organized along the cornerstones of safety as described in the revised reactor oversight process. The attached PIM includes items summarized from inspection reports or other docketed correspondence between the NRC and Vermont Yankee. We did not document all aspects of licensee programs and performance that may be functioning appropriately. Rather, we only documented issues that we believe warrant management attention or represent noteworthy aspects of performance. In addition, the PPR may also have considered some predecisional and draft material that does not appear in the attached PIM, including observations from events and inspections that had occurred since our last inspection report was issued, but had not yet received full review and consideration. We will make this material publically available as part of the normal issuance of our inspection reports and other correspondence.

Enclosure 2 lists our planned inspections for the period April 2000 through March 2001 at Vermont Yankee to allow you to resolve scheduling conflicts and personnel availability in advance of our inspector arrival onsite. Since many of the inspections at Vermont Yankee and at other Region 1 facilities during this period involve a team of inspectors, our ability to reschedule inspections is limited. Therefore we request that you inform us as soon as possible of any scheduling conflicts. The inspection schedule for the latter half of the period is more tentative and may be adjusted in the future due to emerging performance issues at Vermont Yankee or other Region I facilities. We also included some NRC non-inspection activities in Enclosure 2 for your information. Routine resident inspections are not listed due to their ongoing and continuous nature.

We will inform you of any changes to the inspection plan. If you have any questions, please contact me at 610-337-5227.

Clifford J. Anderson, Chief
Reactor Projects Branch 5
Division of Reactor Projects

Docket No.: 05000-271
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Enclosures: Plant Issues Matrix
NRC Inspection Plan

cc w/encl:

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