

March 26, 2013

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Markey:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of March 18, 2013, requesting that the agency use a specific format for the public meetings regarding the 2012 performance of both the Pilgrim and Seabrook nuclear power plants. Your letter expressed concerns with the NRC's plan to conduct "open house-style" meetings at both of these sites, versus a "town hall-style" meeting with a question and answer session. When interacting with the public, we use both formats, depending on the circumstances. With regard to the open house format, we have received positive feedback from the stakeholder community that this approach provides them with a better understanding of the technical issues, and provides a more thorough dialogue with technical experts. Therefore, it is our preferred method for discussing plant performance assessment in certain circumstances.

At Pilgrim, we will have two opportunities for the public to ask questions. First, as you mentioned, we have planned an open house to freely exchange information between the public and the NRC. During this open house, NRC staff will be available to respond to questions on the safety performance at Pilgrim for 2012 and on plant-specific issues. This format offers individuals an opportunity to talk at length, either one-on-one or in small groups, with NRC technical subject matter experts. It also allows organized groups to set up displays outlining their views on nuclear safety. A large number of questions can be answered during an open house due to the number of conversations going on in parallel.

In addition, we are responding to a request from the Board of Selectmen of the Town of Plymouth, the host community for Pilgrim, for a briefing by the NRC staff on the planned construction of an Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI) at Pilgrim. This issue has received a lot of interest from the local community. To honor this request, in addition to conducting our annual assessment meeting, the staff will give a presentation at the Selectmen's meeting on nuclear waste storage and ISFSI safety, and also discuss Pilgrim's performance over the past year. The NRC presentation on Pilgrim plant performance will include plant-specific operating, enforcement, and safety information and statistics. The Board's meeting includes a question and answer session with the public that is facilitated by the Board. We believe that these presentations, coupled with the open house previously mentioned, will satisfy your request for providing information to the public.

In the case of Seabrook, we will also have two opportunities for the public to ask questions. To discuss plant safety performance at Seabrook during 2012, the NRC has scheduled an open house meeting on March 27. We will have technical specialists from headquarters and Region I on hand to answer questions from the public. The NRC chose the open house format for this meeting because it provides an effective forum for discussing these issues with members of the public.

Also at Seabrook, we have conducted, and plan to continue conducting, a variety of outreach activities to meet the needs of the public—including the town hall presentation format some of your constituents prefer. In December 2012, the NRC staff held a well-attended town hall-style public meeting to discuss the concrete degradation found at the facility, a subject of interest in the communities near Seabrook over the last several years. The staff anticipates holding a follow-up town hall-style meeting in a few months to update the public on our oversight of this issue and other timely matters. This timing is appropriate given when we expect to have meaningful information from the continued review and inspection by the NRC of this issue as well as from the ongoing concrete test program being conducted by the licensee.

In addition to various public meetings, the staff has frequent communication with interested members of the public, either on the phone or in writing, to address their issues promptly.

With respect to your request to have the licensees actively participate and answer questions during these NRC-sponsored meetings, there is no regulatory requirement for a licensee to attend NRC meetings related to public outreach. Having said that, we encourage them to come and answer questions relevant to their activities.

Please contact me or Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776, if you have questions or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Allison M. Macfarlane

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John F. Tierney
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bill Keating
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515