

March 15, 2007

CAL No. NRR-07-004

Mr. Randall K. Edington
Senior Vice President, Nuclear
Mail Station 7602
Arizona Public Service Company
P. O. Box 52034
Phoenix, AZ 85072-2034

SUBJECT: CONFIRMATORY ACTION LETTER - PALO VERDE NUCLEAR GENERATING
STATION, UNITS 1, 2, AND 3 (TAC NOS. MD4169, MD4170, AND MD4171)

Dear Mr. Edington:

This letter confirms commitments by Arizona Public Service Company (APS) regarding Alloy 82/182 butt welds in the pressurizers at Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station (PVNGS), Units 1, 2, and 3.

The discovery, in October 2006, of five circumferential indications in three dissimilar metal (DM) welds on the pressurizer at the Wolf Creek Generating Station (Wolf Creek) raised safety concerns based on the size and location of the indications. At Wolf Creek, three indications were in the pressurizer surge nozzle-to-safe end weld, and two separate indications were in the safety and relief nozzle-to-safe end welds. These findings also indicated that significant concerns might exist with the inspection schedules for addressing the pressurizer weld concerns issued by the industry-sponsored Materials Reliability Program (MRP), in "Primary System Piping Butt Weld Inspection and Evaluation Guideline (MRP-139)."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is concerned about the pressurizer surge nozzle-to-safe end weld indications, as this is the first time that multiple circumferential primary water stress-corrosion cracking (PWSCC) indications have been identified in a weld. This condition calls into question the degree of safety margin present in past structural integrity evaluations for flawed DM welds susceptible to PWSCC, since multiple stress-corrosion cracking flaws may grow independently and ultimately grow together, significantly reducing the time from flaw initiation to leakage or rupture. The size of the relief nozzle-to-safe end flaw is also of concern, as this flaw has a much larger aspect ratio than those assumed in the estimates used to establish the basis for completing the baseline inspections required by the industry-sponsored MRP. Larger aspect ratios could result in achieving a critical flaw size and rupture before the onset of detectable leakage.

The long-term resolution of this issue is expected to involve changes to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers Boiler and Pressure Vessel Code (ASME Code), and will involve changes to the NRC regulations in Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR), Part 50, Section 50.55a, "Codes and standards." The development of the NRC regulations, whether the rule adopts the ASME Code standards or defines separate requirements, will likely

benefit from additional operating experience, continuing assessments, and analysis being conducted by the NRC and the MRP.

Until NRC regulations are revised, it is necessary to establish a minimum set of enhanced reactor coolant system (RCS) DM butt weld inspection expectations for nickel-based Alloy 82/182 pressurizer surge, spray, safety, and relief nozzle butt welds, including safe end welds, to supplement existing inspection and other requirements of the ASME Code and NRC regulations. In addition, enhanced monitoring of RCS leakage is needed to promptly identify any through-wall flaws in the pressurizer surge, spray, safety, or relief nozzle DM butt welds or safe end DM butt welds to prevent additional degradation from occurring. The above actions provide reasonable assurance that there is no undue risk to the health and safety of the public while the NRC regulations are revised.

The NRC communicated the need for near-term enhancements to the industry through public meetings held on November 30, 2006, December 20, 2006, and February 2, 2007. Licensees submitted letters voluntarily committing to the enhanced inspection and leakage monitoring requirements. After teleconferences with specific licensees held between February 12 through February 23, 2007, the licensees submitted supplemental commitment letters addressing the NRC staff's concerns regarding inspection, compensatory actions, and reporting.

In your letter dated January 31, 2007 (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession Number ML070430378), as supplemented by letter dated February 16, 2007 (ADAMS Accession No. ML070590212) you described actions you will take at PVNGS, Units 1, 2, and 3 for the pressurizer dissimilar metal butt welds containing Alloy 82/182 material. These commitments address: 1) completion schedules for inspection/mitigation of the welds; 2) RCS leak monitoring frequency, action levels, and actions; 3) reporting requirements, and 4) reinspection frequencies.

The NRC has reviewed these actions and commitments and agrees the actions and commitments are appropriate to address the potential of PWSCC of the applicable pressurizer dissimilar metal butt welds containing Alloy 82/182 material with the following clarification regarding one of the commitments made in your February 16, 2007, letter.

Note 1 of the table on page 2 reads as follows, "This commitment was made for PVNGS Unit 2 in letter 102-05640, dated January 31, 2007, by stating that APS will accelerate the Unit 2 weld overlays currently scheduled for the spring of 2008 if analytical results do not demonstrate that current schedules are adequate or if new information is obtained during upcoming inspections that challenge current assumptions."

The needed clarification is that the analytical results developed by the Nuclear Energy Institute and the MRP must provide reasonable assurance of safety to the NRC. This clarification was discussed with and agreed upon by your facility staff on February 21, 2007 (ADAMS Accession No. ML070660365).

Pursuant to Section 182 of the Atomic Energy Act, 42 U.S.C. 2232, you are required to:

- 1) Notify me immediately if your understanding differs from that set forth above;

- 2) Notify me if for any reason you cannot complete the actions and commitments within the specified schedule and advise me in writing of your modified schedule in advance of the change; and
- 3) Notify me in writing when you have completed the actions and commitments addressed in this Confirmatory Action Letter.

Issuance of this Confirmatory Action Letter does not preclude issuance of an order formalizing the above commitments or requiring other actions on the part of the licensee; nor does it preclude the NRC from taking enforcement action for violations of NRC requirements that may have prompted the issuance of this letter. In addition, failure to take the actions addressed in this Confirmatory Action Letter may result in enforcement action.

In accordance with 10 CFR 2.390 of the NRC's "Rules of Practice," a copy of this letter and your response will be made available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from the NRC's ADAMS, accessible from the NRC Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. To the extent possible, your response should not include any personal privacy, proprietary, or safeguards information so that it can be made available to the Public without redaction. If personal privacy or proprietary information is necessary to provide an acceptable response, then please provide a bracketed copy of your response that identifies the information that should be protected and a redacted copy of your response that deletes such information. If you request withholding of such material, you must specifically identify the portions of your response that you seek to have withheld and provide in detail the bases for your claim of withholding (e.g., explain why the disclosure of information will create an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy or provide the information required by 10 CFR 2.390(b) to support a request for withholding confidential commercial or financial information). If safeguards information is necessary to provide an acceptable response, please provide the level of protection described in 10 CFR 73.21.

Sincerely,

/RA/

J. E. Dyer, Director
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket Nos. 50-528, 50-529, and 50-530

License Nos. NPF-41, NPF-51, and NPF-74

cc: See next page

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J. E. Dyer, Director
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Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station

cc:

Mr. Steve Olea
Arizona Corporation Commission
1200 W. Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Mr. Douglas Kent Porter
Senior Counsel
Southern California Edison Company
Law Department, Generation Resources
P.O. Box 800
Rosemead, CA 91770

Senior Resident Inspector
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
P.O. Box 40
Buckeye, AZ 85326

Regional Administrator, Region IV
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Harris Tower & Pavillion
611 Ryan Plaza Drive, Suite 400
Arlington, TX 76011-8064

Chairman
Maricopa County Board of Supervisors
301 W. Jefferson, 10th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Mr. Aubrey V. Godwin, Director
Arizona Radiation Regulatory Agency
4814 South 40 Street
Phoenix, AZ 85040

Mr. Scott Bauer, Acting General Manager
Regulatory Affairs and
Performance Improvement
Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station
Mail Station 7636
P.O. Box 52034
Phoenix, AZ 85072-2034

Mr. Matthew Benac
Assistant Vice President
Nuclear & Generation Services
El Paso Electric Company
340 East Palm Lane, Suite 310
Phoenix, AZ 85004

Mr. John Taylor
Public Service Company of New Mexico
2401 Aztec NE, MS Z110
Albuquerque, NM 87107-4224

Mr. Geoffrey M. Cook
Southern California Edison Company
5000 Pacific Coast Hwy Bldg N50
San Clemente, CA 92672

Mr. Robert Henry
Salt River Project
6504 East Thomas Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

Mr. Jeffrey T. Weikert
Assistant General Counsel
El Paso Electric Company
Mail Location 167
123 W. Mills
El Paso, TX 79901

Mr. John Schumann
Los Angeles Department of Water & Power
Southern California Public Power Authority
P.O. Box 51111, Room 1255-C
Los Angeles, CA 90051-0100

Mr. Brian Almon
Public Utility Commission
William B. Travis Building
P.O. Box 13326
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-3326

Ms. Karen O'Regan
Environmental Program Manager
City of Phoenix
Office of Environmental Programs
200 West Washington Street
Phoenix AZ 85003