

COMMITTEES:

APPROPRIATIONS

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TRANSPORTATION

ENVIRONMENT AND  
PUBLIC WORKS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 25, 2013

Allison Macfarlane  
Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Macfarlane:

I am writing to request an update on actions being taken by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to address safety concerns that have been reported at the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station following Superstorm Sandy.

As you know, Superstorm Sandy hit New Jersey on October 29, 2012, bringing unprecedented damage to our coastline, our infrastructure, and homes throughout the state. Given that New Jersey is home to four nuclear reactors that provide approximately 50 percent of the state's electricity, we were fortunate that our nuclear power facilities generally weathered the storm well and that local communities were not put in danger. However, three safety concerns have arisen at Oyster Creek in Ocean County, New Jersey, in the wake of Sandy.

NRC has reported that 36 of Oyster Creek's 43 Emergency Planning Zone sirens failed to operate during Superstorm Sandy. These sirens are designed to warn the public of potential hazards in the event of an emergency. The malfunction of these sirens is of deep concern, even though the plant was off-line for scheduled refueling prior to Superstorm Sandy. Please provide me with any steps the NRC is taking to correct these failures and ensure that all emergency sirens are operable during future emergencies.

In addition, rising tides, the direction of the wind, and the storm's surge combined to raise water levels in Oyster Creek's intake structure. High water levels at the facility prompted safety officials to declare an "unusual event," which was later upgraded to an "alert." While water levels eventually receded, this experience demonstrates a potential safety risk during future extreme weather events. Please provide me with NRC's plans to review or update Oyster Creek's emergency disaster plans to incorporate lessons learned from Superstorm Sandy, including changes in storm surge and flooding potential.

Finally, a safety inspection by NRC has revealed a pinhole leak of about 2 to 3 drops per minute in the reactor's cooling system. NRC has already indicated that this leak could grow into a crack if left unaddressed. However, neither NRC nor the Safety Advisory Panel answered questions about this leak at a recent public meeting. Please provide additional clarity on the status of this leak and actions NRC is requiring at Oyster Creek to address any potential safety concerns resulting from this leak.

The NRC has an obligation not only to ensure the safe operation of nuclear facilities like Oyster Creek, but also to inform affected communities about steps being taken to address safety concerns identified by the agency. I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Frank R. Lautenberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F" and a long, sweeping underline.