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August 24, 2011

The Honorable Greg Jaczko  
Chairman  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
11555 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

I write to urge the Commission to include regulatory requirements for the proper maintenance of emergency diesel and battery generators in light of yesterday's earthquake whose epicenter was centered in Mineral, Virginia, about 10 miles from the North Anna nuclear power plant. While most of the plant's emergency diesel generators worked to provide cooling power to the reactor cores and their spent fuel pools when offsite electricity was lost, one diesel generator reportedly failed to operate.

This illustrates a long-standing concern related to the adequacy of maintenance of emergency diesel generators that must be addressed in order to be certain that any loss of external electricity – be it caused by an earthquake, tornado, flood or terrorist attack – does not lead to the same sort of catastrophic meltdowns that occurred in Japan. The Fukushima meltdown was a long-distance warning to the U.S. nuclear industry to bolster its safety systems, including backup power reliability and redundancy. The Virginia earthquake is now our local 911 call to stop delaying the implementation of stricter safety standards.

In May, I released a report entitled "Fukushima Fallout"<sup>1</sup> that found that "despite decades of reported problems and NRC warnings, a review of NRC documents conducted by the staff of Congressman Edward J. Markey indicates that there have been recurrent and prolonged malfunctions of emergency diesel generators (EDGs) at nuclear power plants in the U.S. In the past eight years there have been at least 69 reports of emergency diesel generator inoperability at 33 nuclear power plants. A total of 48 reactors were affected including 19 failures lasting over two weeks and 6 that lasted longer than a month." A cursory search of NRC event reports<sup>2</sup> that have been submitted since May 2011 found an additional 4 reports, which, when combined with yesterday's failure at North Anna, brings the eight year total to 74.

<sup>1</sup> <http://markey.house.gov/docs/05-12-11reportfinalsmall.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> To determine cases of Emergency Diesel Generator inoperability staff used the U.S. NRC Licensee Event Report (LER) Search (<https://lersearch.inl.gov>). Staff searched between the dates 5/1/2011 and 8/23/2011 using keyword criteria "emergency diesel generators."

As the report also notes, the NRC has twice – in both 1989<sup>3</sup> and 2007<sup>4</sup> - warned its licensees regarding diesel generator failures. However, no regulatory requirements have been imposed on licensees to ensure that the generators are properly maintained and operational. I urge the Commission to remedy that as part of its regulatory revisions it plans to take to enhance the ability of reactors to cope with prolonged electricity outages as recommended by the NRC's Near-Term Task Force Report on Fukushima. Having emergency diesel generators and secondary battery generators onsite is not sufficient; the Commission must prescribe and enforce maintenance requirements to ensure that the generators operate as intended.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this important matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please have your staff contact Dr. Michal Freedhoff of my staff at 202-225-2836.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/gen-comm/info-notices/1989/in89007.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML0717/ML071760544.pdf>