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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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To the Editor
NY Times

Your Dec. 25 article (“Nuclear Firms Seek Rules to Combat Attacks”) confused the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s ongoing work on security-related rules. The agency has been considering aircraft impacts at new nuclear reactor designs long before the nuclear industry’s letter of December 8, 2006, which was mistakenly portrayed as asking for new standards. That letter proposes nothing we haven’t already considered and does not ask for tougher design standards. Instead, the industry asked us for a last-minute change to proposed regulations concerning the process for licensing new reactors that are currently in front of the Commission for a vote. Those proposed regulations are not the proper place to include security issues.

The NRC has already evaluated the operating reactor fleet’s ability to safely deal with the aftermath of an aircraft impact, and I and my fellow Commissioners are currently considering how to evaluate new reactor designs. These evaluations, which will be done long before any new reactor is built, could result in design modifications prior to construction. Such evaluations would also identify features already present in the design for dealing with large fires and explosions. The Commission will consider all proposals – those of the NRC staff, industry and others – before we decide on how to best move forward with a proposed rule for such evaluations. The proposed rule on evaluating new reactor designs will then be issued for public comment before the Commission issues a final rule. The NRC rulemaking process is a carefully considered process that maintains the NRC’s pledge to keep public health and safety as our top priority, along with conducting our work as publicly and transparently as possible.

The article was also mistaken in attempting to tie the evaluations to the NRC’s consideration of the Design Basis Threat, the types of attacks plants must use their own resources to defend against with high assurance of success. The Commission plans to vote on this issue in the near future.

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Chairman