

# NRC ex-investigator: Top official blocked search for TMI cover-up

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HARRISBURG — A former Nuclear Regulatory Commission investigator testified yesterday that a top commission official repeatedly thwarted an NRC inquiry into whether crucial information was covered up during the first days of the March 1979 accident at Three Mile Island.

David Gamble, who participated in the probe, said he was told by James Cummings, head of the NRC's Office of Inspector and Auditor, not to interview two control-room workers about critical aspects of the Unit 2 accident.

Gamble also testified that in 1980, Cummings would not allow him to interview eight other TMI and NRC

employees to determine whether NRC inspectors had lied about their awareness of what happened on March 28, 1979, the first day of the accident. Gamble said that Cummings refused to let him use polygraph examinations to aid in the investigation.

Gamble presented his testimony to an NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board that is hearing evidence on whether Herman Dieckamp, president of General Public Utilities Corp. (GPU), the owner of TMI, lied to a congressman and the NRC about the accident.

TMI Alert, a Harrisburg-based citizens' group that is a party in the licensing board hearing, has maintained that Dieckamp and TMI plant personnel knew on March 28 that the

Unit 2 reactor core had suffered extensive damage, yet concealed that information from state and federal officials for nearly two days.

In his second day of testimony before the board, Gamble continued to challenge the integrity of the NRC's efforts to investigate the reporting of information by TMI and NRC personnel during the accident. In one report issued in January 1981, the NRC concluded that TMI officials did not improperly withhold information about the accident.

Federal sources say a federal grand jury in Washington is investigating whether NRC employees acted improperly in investigating events surrounding the TMI accident.

Gamble testified yesterday that  
(See TMI on 2-B)

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## TMI from 1-B

Cummings told him not to interview John Chwastyk and Brian Mebler, Unit 2 control room personnel, for an investigation centering on the events surrounding a hydrogen explosion inside the reactor building. After Gamble made his remarks about Cummings, Ivan Smith, an administrative law judge heading the hearing, said he was concerned that a top NRC official "prohibited a complete inquiry."

"It is a matter that warrants a more thorough inquiry, that's pretty obvious," Smith said.

Cummings, who is currently on sabbatical from his job at the NRC, could not be reached for comment.

Gamble also testified that he asked his NRC superior, Roger Fortuna, to seek authorization for Gamble to conduct eight additional interviews to determine if NRC inspectors may have lied about their knowledge of the hydrogen explosion and the severity of the accident. Gamble said that Fortuna made the request in a memo to Cummings.

During yesterday's hearing, a copy of that November 6, 1980, memo was placed before the licensing board as evidence. One page of the memo had a slash drawn through it and was marked with a "NO" and the initials "J.C."

Gamble said it was Cummings who drew the slash through the memo.

signaling his rejection of the request for more interviews.

"So, he canceled everything?" asked Smith.

"Yes, sir," Gamble replied.

Gamble testified that on another occasion, he asked Fortuna to write a letter asking for the U.S. Naval Investigative Service to assist in administering the detector tests to determine if NRC and TMI employees may have committed perjury during previous federal investigations into the accident.

The December 1, 1980, letter introduced as evidence in the hearing, had a slash drawn through it. A large "NO" was written at the top.

"Who wrote 'no'?" the licensing board asked.

"It was Mr. Cummings," Gamble replied.

The licensing board hearing which is expected to conclude next week, is part of an NRC review to determine whether the undamaged Unit 1 reactor at TMI should be allowed to begin producing electricity again.

Unit 1 was shut down for refueling and repairs at the time of the Unit 1 accident and has been closed ever since under an NRC order. GPU Nuclear Corp., the GPU subsidiary that operates the nuclear station, has been seeking the NRC's permission to restart Unit 1.