

## TMI a Step Closer to Restart

### NRC approves plan that may let Unit 1 operate

By Jim Dejen and Susan FitzGerald  
*Inquirer Staff Writers*

WASHINGTON — The Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved a plan yesterday that may allow the restart of the undamaged reactor at Three Mile Island as early as this summer.

The action could lead to an NRC vote by June on whether to restart Unit 1. The plan, which would allow the reactor to begin operating before questions about the competence and integrity of the plant's management are resolved, was immediately criticized by Gov. Thornburgh and Pennsylvania's two U.S. senators, Arlen Specter and John Heinz.

It also drew strong protest from citizen groups, which said the action improperly short-circuited at least five NRC investigations concerning the management of General Public Utilities Corp., the owner of Three Mile Island.

"It's the most frightening development since the accident," said Joanne Doroshow, a lawyer for TMI Alert, a Harrisburg-based group opposed to the restart. "I think the entire nation should be alarmed." TMI's Unit 2 was crippled March 28, 1979, in the nation's worst commercial nuclear accident.

NRC chairman Nunzio J. Palladino said he thought the plan approved yesterday offered "a reasonable approach" and would enable the commission to decide by June on whether to allow the restart of the undamaged reactor.



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#### Approved 3-2

The commission approved the plan at a hastily called meeting by a vote of 3-2. Palladino and commissioners Thomas Roberts and Frederick Bernthal supported the plan; commissioners James K. Asseltine and Victor Gilinsky opposed it.

Under the plan, the commission could allow Unit 1 to restart if certain lower-level GPU Nuclear employees were temporarily "separated" from their involvement in running the plant. GPU Nuclear, a subsidiary of General Public Utilities, operates the plant.

It would allow William Kuhns, chairman of General Public Utilities board, and Herman Dieckamp, president of the company, to remain in their current positions. The plan also would require assurances that key officials of the company were not involved in falsification of safety records at Unit 1, and that the repair of 31,000 steam generator tubes at the reactor had been done safely.

Palladino said that the vote yesterday was "not a restart decision and does not authorize restart."

But the approved plan appears to have removed one of the most significant hurdles that General Public Utilities faced in gaining permission to restart Unit 1: that of resolving questions concerning the integrity of the organization's management.

#### Sought for years

For more than four years, GPU has been seeking the commission's approval to restart Unit 1, which was shut down for refueling and repairs at the time of the accident at Unit 2. Palladino said he was hopeful that the plan would allow the commission to reach a final decision by June on

whether to restart the plant. If approval is given, Dieckamp said, the plant could begin operating later in the summer.

"We think it's ready to begin operating now," Dieckamp said after the commission vote yesterday. "But we will, of course, go through a systematic start-up program to make sure the plant is operated safely."

Roland Page, an aide to Thornburgh, said the governor remained opposed to restart until there is a "convincing conclusion" to investigations concerning management competence and integrity, and until a firm funding plan is in place to complete the cleanup of Unit 2.

"Until I am assured that adequate funding will be provided to remove the obvious and growing radiation hazard at one end of TMI, I cannot agree with any assertion that nuclear generation ought to be resumed at the other end," the governor said in a prepared statement.

Immediately after yesterday's vote, Heinz sent a letter to Palladino opposing the restart.

Specter said he intended to ask Sen. Alan K. Simpson of Wyoming, chairman of the subcommittee on nuclear energy, to hold Senate hearings "as promptly as possible on the NRC's handling of this matter."

Asseltine, one of the commission's critics, said yesterday that he could not agree to a plan that would allow a restart vote before the NRC has completed at least five separate investigations involving General Public Utilities' management integrity.

"In the years since the Three Mile Island accident, the commission has repeatedly stressed the critical role of management in the safe operation of nuclear power plants," Asseltine said. "It is unfortunate that, when put to the test, the commission has failed to sustain this principle with its actions."

Among the issues the NRC is still investigating is whether key safety records were falsified at Units 1 and 2 during the months leading up to the March 1979 accident, whether General Public Utilities violated procedures in the \$1 billion cleanup of Unit 2, and whether the company harassed workers and former workers who raised questions about the safety of the cleanup.

Other investigations center on whether company officials improperly delayed giving the NRC consulting reports that were critical of the com-

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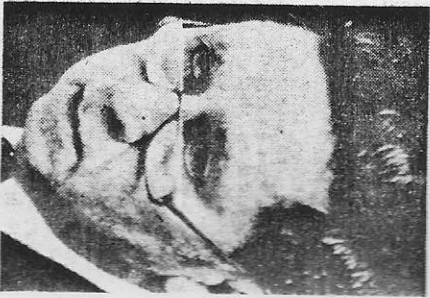
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Other investigations center on whether company officials improperly delayed giving the NRC consulting reports that were critical of the com-

pany and whether officials changed internal reports about the accident to project a more favorable image of the company.

On Nov. 7, a federal grand jury accused Metropolitan Edison Co., a subsidiary of GPU that was operating Three Mile Island at the time of the 1979 accident, of deliberately falsifying safety records during the months before the accident. The 11-count indictment marked the first time in the 27-year history of commercial nuclear power in the United States that a utility was indicted on charges of violating NRC safety requirements. The case is expected to go to trial in Harrisburg later this year.

In addition, the NRC staff said in May that it could no longer vouch for the integrity and competence of General Public Utilities' management because of unresolved criminal and civil investigations. Most of those investigations have not been completed.

Asseltine said it was Palladino who had proposed and pushed for approval of the restart plan outlined yesterday.

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