



Bill Zewe, a TMI supervisor, at the helm.

TMI supervisor unimpressed with required changes

By PATRICE FLINCHBAUGH
Of the Daily Record

MIDDLETOWN — Although much has changed at Three Mile Island since the nation's worst commercial nuclear disaster crippled a \$1.2 billion reactor here nearly two years ago, a control room supervisor is calling some required changes in the other, undamaged, unit cosmetic.

Before General Public Utilities Co. can restart the idle Unit 1 reactor, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has required the utility to equip its control room with a lot of new hardware and wiring that is supposed to prevent accidents like the one that happened March 28, 1979.

TMI officials stress the NRC can authorize restart of the undamaged unit before federal safety hearings in Harrisburg end. According to

one TMI spokesman, the federal Atomic Safety and Licensing Board's final decision — expected by September — is not binding on the nuclear commission members. Restart is not physically possible before that time, though, the utility spokesmen say. Preliminary testing will extend at least through this summer, they add.

William Zewe, a shift supervisor in the control center of Unit 1, said during a tour Monday some of the government-ordered modifications to Unit 1's control panel will benefit veteran reactor operators little. He was referring to modifications in the labelling and layout of the control panel.

Zewe said new operators, however, will undoubtedly be aided by the new tags, fire alarms and lights in the control room. Training new workers on the altered control pan-

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Feds question value of change in TMI valve

By PATRICE FLINCHBAUGH
Of the Daily Record

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators are unsure whether changes made in a pressure valve — whose failure caused the accident at Three Mile Island — will make the Middletown plant safer to operate.

Rather than open the massive steel mechanism called PORV (power operated relief valve), a new pressure control would bypass the valve and shut down the entire reactor, Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff members told an NRC technical advisory board Thursday.

The panel of atomic scientists is holding a two-day hearing to evaluate changes made at TMI in preparation for the restart of Unit 1. Other federal safety hearings on TMI-1 in Harrisburg are expected to end by mid-July.

Unit one's sister reactor was crippled in a mishap 2½ years ago,

when the PORV stuck open, eventually leading to core damage and release of radiation to the public.

As a result of the accident, the NRC is requiring modifications at many of the nation's 98 nuclear plants.

The new TMI valve setup would rely largely on main reactor safety systems, which never have been challenged on a regular basis in any operating plant, the NRC staff acknowledged.

"I can recognize the motivation here... They had an accident with a PORV, but no one has demonstrated that the fix has decreased the risk," said panelist William Kerr, professor of nuclear engineering and director of energy research at The University of Michigan.

Valves have been troublesome to the nuclear industry for years, according to Bob Pollard of the Union of Concerned Scientists and a for-

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Met-Ed has been constructing, without final NRC approval, a device called a "submerged demineralizer system (SDS)" to clean up the accident water. Snyder said Monday the NRC will not base its evaluation of SDS on cost considerations to the utility, which has repeatedly cried pauper.

cesium when solidified in cement leaches out in hundreds of days.

Snyder said other methods of treating the water were considered by the NRC. He said diluting and releasing it into the Susquehanna would have no adverse health effects, according to staff conclusions.

Snyder acknowledged there are some currently unsolved problems with SDS. For one, preliminary reports show that radioactive

The first in a series of public meetings to discuss the NRC document is scheduled for Sept. 3 at the Education Forum in Harrisburg, Snyder added.

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NRC employee. Steam control is no easy task when pressure builds to 2,500 pounds per square inch on a valve, said Pollard.

"People don't understand what high pressure steam does to steel — it cuts through it like butter," said Pollard.

General Public Utilities Inc., which owns TMI, and the NRC staff said they had not studied the risks of changing PORV's sensitivity, despite the panel's request to do so in a March 11, 1980, letter to the NRC chairman.

"I thought the staff would have a strong answer by now," charged panel consultant S. Zindaus.

To some of the panelists in the

packed NRC hearing room, the answer seemed obvious.

"Have you (GPU) given any consideration to designing the valve right?" said Ivan Catton, a panel consultant. "I see here a fantastic system to attach (indicators) to pipes... but it looks like you're building yourselves one huge headache when a proper valve would solve the problem," he added.