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UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NOTE TO EDITORS: The following was telephoned to the media at 6:30 p.m. EST on Friday, March 30.

The Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Joseph M. Hendrie said this afternoon that there is no imminent danger of a core melt at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Plant.

Additional technical experts from the Commission staff headed by the Director of the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation Mr. Harold Denton reached the site early this afternoon. At the direction of the President, they have been provided with augmented communication facilities. The NRC team at the site is working closely with the utility personnel and experts from other federal agencies and the State of Pennsylvania. Close contact is being maintained with Governor Thornburgh.

Efforts to reduce the temperatures of the reactor fuel are continuing. These temperatures have been coming down slowly and the final depressurization of the reactor vessel has been delayed. There is evidence of severe damage to the nuclear fuel. Samples of primary coolant containing high-levels of radioiodine and instruments in the core indicate high fuel temperatures in some of the fuel bundles, and the presence of a large bubble of non-condensable gases in the top of the reactor vessel.

Because of these non-condensable gases, the possibility exists of interrupting primary coolant flow within the reactor should the pressure be further decreased and the contained gases allowed to expand. In the unlikely event that this were to occur some of the fuel would fail to cool and further damage to that fuel could occur. Several options to reach a final safe state for the fuel are under consideration. In the meantime, the reactor is being maintained in a stable condition.

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There have been intermittent releases of radioactivity into the atmosphere from the primary coolant system. The licensee is attempting to stop the intermittent gaseous releases by transferring the radioactive coolant water into the primary containment building. The levels of radioactivity being measured have been as high as 20 to 25 millirem per hour in the immediate vicinity of the site at ground level. Off-site levels were a few millirem per hour.

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