

Nuclear committee draws fire

WASHINGTON (AP) — Members of the Three Mile Island commission told congressional critics Wednesday that the final report of their investigation is far-reaching, even though it does not recommend a nuclear moratorium.

John Kemeny, chairman of the presidential commission, told a joint congressional hearing that the day-old report recommends strong medicine

for the nuclear industry and its government regulators.

But the 179-page report on the March 28 nuclear accident drew strong criticism from the chairmen of the two congressional panels that oversee nuclear power. They said its recommendations didn't go far enough.

"In the absence of a moratorium there will be a tendency to use Band-Aides where surgery

is required," said Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., chairman of the House Interior Committee.

And Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., chairman of the Senate Nuclear Regulatory subcommittee, said, "I am troubled by the commission's decision not to recommend a delay in construction of new plants."

Commission member Carolyn Lewis, who had sought to get a moratorium recommendation included in the final report, said the decision not to include one was a close decision, accompanied by "a sense of anguish" on the part of commissioners.

But Kemeny, president of Dartmouth College, contended the commission recommended what amounts to a form of moratorium. He pointed to the panel's recommendations that no new nuclear plants be licensed unless major safety improvements are incorporated, the plant operator agrees to live up to tough new standards and unless the state has an approved evacuation plan on the books.

And the commission chairman said while the 12-member panel was divided on the issue of a moratorium, it unanimously agreed to recommend a major restructuring of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Commissioner Paul Marks testified that "there has been inadequate attention to the human factor."

Marks, vice president of Health Sciences at Columbia University, said that in general the equipment at the plant "functioned as designed," but operators were poorly equipped to deal with the crisis.

The report generally levelled a broad indictment at the nuclear industry and its regulators but stopped short of recommending a moratorium — an issue on which the commission was closely divided.

Meanwhile, an Associated Press-NBC New Poll showed Wednesday that most Americans appear to favor a moratorium on new nuclear plants until safety issues can be resolved.

However, the majority sentiment for such a moratorium is not solely the result of the Three Mile Island accident. At most, the accident appears to have intensified existing support found for such a moratorium in an AP-NBC News poll late last year.

Although Udall indicated as recently as last summer an opposition to a nuclear moratorium, he said Wednesday he'd changed his mind — and now feels that at least a "conditional moratorium" is needed.

There are now 70 commercial nuclear power plants in the country and two owned by the government. Another 91 either are under construction or have construction licenses.

making the news

From Associated Press Reports

MEXICO CITY — Investigators will examine taped cockpit comments to try and determine why a Western Airlines DC-10 jetliner touched down on the wrong runway and crashed at Mexico City's fog-shrouded airport Wednesday, killing at least 63 of the 88 or 89 persons aboard, officials said.

Red Cross and U.S. consular officials said 63 bodies had been recovered by late afternoon, and 19 survivors were taken to three area hospitals. The fate of the other passengers was unknown. One person, a truck driver, was killed on the ground.

The Mexican Department of Communications and Transportation said the accident probably occurred because the plane tried to land on a runway that had been declared closed for almost two weeks.

In Washington, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration said the major question is why the pilot was attempting to land on a closed runway. Mexican authorities hope the black boxes will provide answers.

PORTLAND — Emissions from a coal-fired generating plant being built by Portland General Electric, Co. were underestimated by 50 percent, a state Department of Environmental Quality official said Tuesday.

Technicians originally estimated the plant near Boardman in northeastern Oregon would spew 20,000 tons of sulfur dioxides into the air annually. The correct amount is closer to 30,000 tons, said John Kowalczyk, technical services supervisor for the agency.

The error won't affect PGE's permit to operate the plant, he said.

Kowalczyk said the plant, scheduled to begin operating in mid-1980, still will meet federal clean air standards that are based on emissions in pounds per British thermal unit of heat produced by the plant. Technicians erred when converting that figure to tons, Kowalczyk said.

WASHINGTON — The Soviet Union has taken steps over the past month which have eased U.S. concerns about the nature of Soviet troops in Russian, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance said Wednesday.

Vance did not spell out what he meant. But other officials said the Soviet troops have adopted a "lower profile" and no longer engage in military maneuvers.

These officials, who asked not to be identified, stressed that there has been no reduction in the number of Russian troops or in the amount of Soviet weaponry and other equipment.

Since Pres. Carter's Oct. 1 nationwide address on the number of Soviet troops in Cuba, officials said, "there has been less traffic back and forth" between the Soviet Union and Cuba, and the Soviet troops have been "less active."

WASHINGTON — The Air Force research chief said Wednesday the United States probably could develop a workable laser beam weapon against some Soviet satellites within about four years.

But Lt. Gen. Thomas Stafford said "we decided not to push it." Instead, he said, "we would hope to negotiate a treaty" with the Soviet Union that would ban such weapons.

A high-intensity laser generates a concentrated beam of light that scientists say could burn out a satellite's electronic circuits and key equipment, thus disabling it. The United States also has explored the possibility of using lasers against hostile missiles and planes.

A laser is an intense beam of light and heat, while a charged-particle beam is a stream of microscopic pellets that has been likened to a lightning bolt.

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