

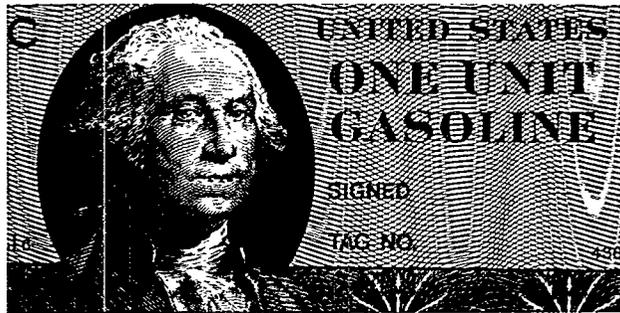
higher than 65°F for heating and to no lower than 80°F for cooling, and prohibited nonessential advertising lighting. Gasoline rationing, to be carried out only if necessary, involved ration checks redeemable for coupons issued primarily on the basis of motor vehicle registrations. These contingency plans required an affirmative vote by both houses of Congress within sixty days of their submittal. Once approved, they could be implemented by the President only if he found that the country was in “a severe energy supply interruption” or that implementation was necessary for the United States to fulfill its energy conservation obligations agreed to in the International Energy Agency.⁶¹

Meeting in early March, the International Energy Agency, created to coordinate the industrialized oil-consuming nations’ response to the 1973-1974 oil crisis, agreed that its members would reduce oil demand by two million barrels per day. The United States, as its contribution, promised to absorb half this reduction.⁶²

Meanwhile, the Nation’s energy situation continued to deteriorate. One by one, oil-exporting countries raised their prices to take advantage of tightening world supplies. Federal price controls on gasoline were eased, allowing prices to rise, but in some areas spot shortages began to appear. Steep increases in energy costs threatened to induce an economic recession. A dismayed Schlesinger observed that the “call for voluntary conservation isn’t working.” The President and his energy advisers, as a result, began to consider additional energy measures, and plans were laid for the President to deliver his second major energy message to the American people.⁶³

THREE MILE ISLAND

On the morning of March 28, as the administration concentrated its attention on dealing with the escalating energy shortage, Americans learned of the unexpected and frightening accident at the nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. For almost two weeks the Nation watched with both fascination and apprehension as scientists, engineers, and technicians worked to shut down the plant. Following its emergency



Gasoline ration coupons were printed for emergency use but never issued.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

plans, the Department of Energy dispatched more than 200 people to Three Mile Island to help contain the crisis. In October 1979 the Presidential Commission on Three Mile Island, known as the Kemeny Commission, concluded that the crisis was the result of “people-related problems and not equipment problems” and that “except for human failures, the major accident at Three Mile Island would have been a minor incident.”⁶⁴

Three Mile Island only added to the problems faced by the Nation’s nuclear power industry. By 1979 new orders for nuclear power plants were nonexistent, and problems with licensing, nuclear waste, and a growing antinuclear public plagued the industry. The Carter Administration was ambivalent in its approach to the nuclear issue. Although affirming that light water reactors played a significant role in reducing petroleum imports, President Carter throughout his four-year tenure tried to stop construction of the Clinch River Breeder Reactor—long the centerpiece of the Department’s nuclear fission research and development program—because of the increased dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation presented by breeder reactors.⁶⁵

Following the Three Mile Island accident, Secretary Schlesinger reaffirmed that the Nation had “no real alternative if we are going to maintain energy production than to make effective use of nuclear power.” But the administration’s second national energy plan sent to Congress in early May declared that during the last quarter-century the Federal Government had placed a “disproportionate emphasis” on the nuclear production of electricity. Carter on December 7, 1979,