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CONTACT: Jan Strasma 630/829-9663
Angela Greenman 630/829-9662
E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$55,000 FINE AGAINST CONSUMERS POWER CO.
FOR OCTOBER INCIDENT AT PALISADES NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$55,000 fine against Consumers Power Company for an October 17 incident in which the reactor's control rod drive system was taken out of service during maintenance while the plant was in operation.

The drives move the control rods in the reactor to increase or decrease the reactor power level. A separate system is used to quickly shut down the reactor by fully inserting all control rods.

Maintenance was planned on one of 45 control rod drives. Instead of shutting off electric power to just that drive, however, the plant staff blocked the electric power to all 45 control rod drives.

The control rod drives were disabled for about 3 hours while the maintenance was performed. During that time, the reactor could have been shut down if necessary by inserting all the control rods in an automatic or manual reactor trip. However, the control rods could not have been moved individually to adjust reactor power level.

The company was cited for operational errors made by a shift operating crew and for failures to follow maintenance-related procedures by maintenance personnel during the repair activities.

In notifying the utility of the proposed fine, NRC Regional Administrator A. Bill Beach noted that the reactor protection functions provided by the control rods remained available. But, he added, "The procedural violations evidenced by both maintenance and operations personnel...could in different circumstances present actual or potential safety consequences."

The violations reflected significant weaknesses in the planning, communications, and supervision of the maintenance work, he said.

The utility's corrective actions have included conducting remedial training for the operations personnel involved in the incident, meeting with all shift operating crews and maintenance workers to discuss the incident, and improving the process for managing similar work activities.

The issues associated with taking the control rod drives out of service were discussed at a public meeting at the conclusion of the of the NRC inspection on November 19 and at a predecisional enforcement conference on December 19, which was also open to the public.

The utility has until May 4 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the utility may request a hearing.

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