



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. III-03-032

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April 9, 2003

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NRC TO MEET WITH OFFICIALS FROM EXELON GENERATION COMPANY TO DISCUSS SAFETY PERFORMANCE AT BRAIDWOOD

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with officials from Exelon Generation Company on Friday, April 11, to discuss the results of NRC's annual assessment of the Braidwood nuclear power plant, located near Godley, Illinois.

The meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the Godley Park District Recreation Hall, 500 South Kankakee, in Godley. The public is invited to observe the meeting, and NRC officials will be available before the conclusion of the meeting for questions and comments from the public.

A March 4 letter from the NRC to Exelon Generation Company addresses plant safety performance during the previous year and forms the basis for the meeting discussions. The letter indicates that, overall, both units of the Braidwood nuclear power station operated safely. The letter is available from Region III Public Affairs Office and on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/brai_2002q4.pdf.

The NRC uses a performance-based regulatory safety inspection program, which utilizes a color-coded scale of increasing levels of safety significance, beginning with "green" and progressing to "white," "yellow" and "red." The oversight process uses performance indicators submitted by nuclear power plants and findings from NRC's inspections to evaluate each plant's safety performance. These findings fall into seven specific areas, or "cornerstones," which are key indicators of the safety of a plant's operations. When the regulatory process identifies two "white" issues in the same cornerstone, this cornerstone is considered "degraded." Having a "degraded" cornerstone is not an indication that the plant is unsafe, but it does result in heightened regulatory attention.

According to the letter, Braidwood Unit 1 operated with modest degradation in safety performance during the first two quarters of 2002. The degradation was due to one performance indicator of low to moderate safety significance, associated with the number of times the auxiliary feedwater system could have been inoperable under certain accident conditions, and one inspection finding of low to moderate significance associated with a problem with a pressurizer relief valve. These two white issues, both in the Mitigating Systems Cornerstone, resulted in its "degradation."

During the last two quarters of 2002, the auxiliary feedwater system performance returned to normal.

In November 2002, the NRC conducted a supplemental inspection to take an in-depth look at the circumstances around the two "white" issues. The report concluded that the plant staff had initiated proper corrective actions to address the problems that led to a decline in performance; however, the NRC could not evaluate the effectiveness of these actions because they were still being developed and implemented. Inspection Report 2002-10, which documents the NRC's findings, can be accessed in the NRC's electronic reading room at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm.html>.

In addition, the letter notes: "As you are aware, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the NRC has issued several Orders and threat advisories to enhance security capabilities and improve guard force readiness. We have conducted inspections to review your implementation of these requirements and have monitored your actions in response to changing threat advisories. For calendar year 2003, we plan to continue these inspections and conduct portions of the security baseline inspection program, as well as perform additional inspections to evaluate your compliance with new requirements that may be ordered."

Current performance information for Braidwood is available on the NRC web site at:
http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/BRAI1/brai1_chart.html.
http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/BRAI2/brai2_chart.html.

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