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NRC SCHEDULES OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING FOR APRIL 14 TO DISCUSS PRAIRIE ISLAND NUCLEAR POWER PLANT PERFORMANCE AND NRC OVERSIGHT

Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials have scheduled an open house for Thursday, April 14, to discuss with local residents the agency's assessment of safety performance for last year at the Prairie Island nuclear power plant and other NRC oversight activities.

The open house is informal and will be held from 5 to 6 p.m. CDT; the public meeting will begin at 6 p.m. and consist of a formal discussion of the plant's 2010 performance and a portion of the meeting for the public to ask questions and make comments. The meeting will be held at the Red Wing Public Library, 225 East Avenue, Red Wing, Minn.

The dual-unit plant is operated by Northern States Power Company, Minnesota, and is located in Welch, Minn., about 28 miles southeast of Minneapolis, Minn.

"The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Prairie Island plant and the nation's other commercial nuclear power facilities," said NRC Region III Administrator Mark Satorius. "This meeting allows us to discuss our annual assessment of safety performance with members of the local community. The goal of this open house is to explain how the NRC works to protect people and the environment and answer questions from residents about nuclear regulation."

A letter sent from the NRC Region III office to plant officials addressed the performance of the plant during 2010 and will serve as the basis for the discussion. It is available on the NRC Web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/prai_2010q4.pdf.

Overall, the NRC found that the Prairie Island plant operated safely in 2010.

The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear plant performance. The colors start with "green" and then increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.

All performance indicators and inspection findings for Prairie Island Units 1 and 2 during 2010 were determined to be “green.” Performance indicators are a statistical measurement of plant and equipment performance.

The NRC letter also notes that a cross-cutting issue in the area of human performance at the plant has been adequately addressed by the company. Human performance concerns constitute a “Cross-cutting issue” and affect multiple areas of plant operation. These issues tend to involve behaviors, such as the plant staff’s ability to effectively develop and follow procedures. These behaviors do not constitute violations of NRC requirements. However, they can be major contributing factors to safety-significant findings. When a cross-cutting issue is identified, the NRC expects the problem to be corrected.

The NRC first identified the human performance issue at Prairie Island in mid-2009 and subsequently documented this issue in its annual plant assessment for 2009 and the 2010 mid-year assessment letters and held two public meetings in Dec. 2009 and Dec. 2010 to gain a better understanding of how the company planned to address human performance issues. In the last quarter of 2010, the NRC noted an improvement in this area and “gained confidence in (the company’s) ability to correct the concerns identified.”

Prairie Island will continue to receive the detailed inspection regime required for plants that are operating well and require no additional oversight. Inspections are performed by two NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the Region III Office in Lisle, Ill., and the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md. Among the areas of plant operations being inspected are radiation protection, dry cask spent fuel storage, emergency preparedness and strike contingency planning.

The most current performance information for Prairie Island is available on the NRC website at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI1/prai1_chart.html and http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI2/prai2_chart.html.

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