



NRC NEWS

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NRC SCHEDULES PUBLIC MEETING JULY 17 TO DISCUSS PERFORMANCE OF PRAIRIE ISLAND NUCLEAR POWER STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold a public meeting with representatives of Northern States Power Co. – Minnesota on Tuesday, July 17, to discuss the agency's assessment of safety performance for last year at the Prairie Island Nuclear Power Plant. The two-unit plant is located in Welch, Minn., roughly 50 miles southeast of Minneapolis.

The meeting, which will be open to the public, is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. CDT at the Red Wing High School, 2451 Eagle Ridge Drive in Red Wing. The NRC staff will present the results of the annual assessment, talk about the NRC and its range of activities and be available to respond to questions or comments from the public.

“The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Prairie Island plant and the nation's other nuclear power facilities,” said Regional Administrator for NRC Region III Charles Casto. “This meeting will allow us to speak directly with the local community about the plant's performance last year and the NRC's actions to make sure the plant continues to operate safely. Those actions include additional inspections in response to the events at the Fukushima Daiichi facilities to evaluate the safety of US nuclear plants. The reviews showed that Prairie Island and other US plants continue to operate safely.”

A letter sent from the NRC Region III office to plant officials addressed the performance of the plant during 2011 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_2011q4.pdf

Overall, the NRC found that the Prairie Island facility operated safely in 2011.

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. Performance indicators are statistical measurements of plant and equipment performance.

All performance indicators and inspection findings for Prairie Island Unit 2 during 2011 were determined to be “green.” The letter states that Unit 1 had one “white” finding. The finding involved the potential failure of safety-related battery chargers to perform their safety functions under certain event scenarios. The devices charge batteries which would provide alternate power to remotely operate some of the plant’s safety equipment. Each reactor has two chargers. If both are lost, the chargers can be reset manually in order to continue to operate. No actual event has occurred.

The utility has taken actions to address the issue. The NRC completed a special inspection which reviewed these actions. NRC inspectors concluded that the utility had a thorough understanding of the issue and has successfully resolved it.

The letter also addressed two violations associated with providing inaccurate information to the NRC during the approval of the new emergency action levels associated with radiation monitors. The NRC plans to follow up on these violations during scheduled inspections.

Prairie Island will continue to receive the detailed inspection program used by the NRC for plants. Routine inspections are performed by two NRC resident inspectors assigned to the plant and inspection specialists from the Region III Office in Lisle, Ill., and the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md.

In addition to the day-to-day inspections performed by the resident inspectors, specific areas of plant operations to be inspected include radiation protection, license renewal, problem identification and resolution, in-service inspection activities for safety systems, and emergency preparedness.

The most current performance information for Prairie Island is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI1/prai1_chart.html (Unit1) and http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI2/prai2_chart.html (Unit 2).

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