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NRC Sends Confirmatory Action Letter to Westinghouse Nuclear Fuel Facility Outlining Corrective Actions

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has sent a Confirmatory Action Letter to the Westinghouse nuclear fuel fabrication facility in Columbia, S.C., acknowledging corrective action commitments the company will complete before restarting some of its uranium processing operations.

In May, during an annual maintenance shutdown, plant employees discovered an accumulation of uranium-bearing material in a scrubber system, which is designed to remove unwanted material from a number of plant processes. There were no actual safety-related consequences as a result of the accumulation of the material, but the potential for such consequences may have existed. After an analysis showed the amount of uranium was much higher than anticipated, the NRC launched an inspection to review the issue.

The still-ongoing inspection prompted the need for the Confirmatory Action Letter, or CAL, which outlines a series of corrective actions Westinghouse has already taken or will perform before NRC-licensed operations involving the scrubber system can be resumed. A copy of the CAL will be placed on the NRC website and is available from the NRC's Region II Office of Public Affairs.

Those actions include shutting down affected systems in the facility, performing a root cause analysis investigation of the event, conducting a review and revision of safety culture, updating maintenance and management procedures, installing physical modifications to the system, training personnel operating and maintaining the system, reviewing other potentially affected systems, and retaining an external nuclear criticality safety expert to oversee such functions.

“The commitments outlined in the CAL will greatly reduce the likelihood of such incidents in the future,” said NRC Region II Administrator Cathy Haney. “Westinghouse management has cooperated fully and has assured us of their commitment to these corrective actions and continued safe operations.”

The issuance of the CAL does not preclude the NRC from taking other actions for any violations of NRC requirements that may be identified.

The NRC inspection into the issue includes visits to the facility and in-office reviews of the findings. A report will be issued within 30 days of the completion of the inspection.