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NRC HOSTED TABLETOP EXERCISE IN PREPARATION FOR Y2K

As part of preparations for the "Year 2000", the Nuclear Regulatory Commission conducted a tabletop exercise and training yesterday with Federal, State, and local organizations, and a nuclear utility to share information and understand how contingency plans would be used in response to a potential Year 2000 computer problem at a nuclear power plant after midnight on December 31.

Chairman Greta Joy Dicus indicated, in her opening remarks at the exercise, that the NRC and the nuclear industry have been pursuing a comprehensive program for dealing with potential Y2K problems at nuclear power plants and other nuclear facilities. The full text of her speech is available on NRC's website at www.nrc.gov/OPA/.

About 50 participants representing NRC, Baltimore Gas and Electric -- licensee for Calvert Cliffs nuclear power plant located near Lusby, Md.,--the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Communications System (organization), the State of Maryland, Calvert County, and St. Mary's County, discussed a number of scenarios involving loss of communication among the various players, loss of offsite power to the nuclear power plant site, and the loss of power to NRC's Emergency Operations Center in Rockville, Md. Under each scenario, participants explained their roles and the procedures that would be followed should a Y2K problem occur during the December 31 - January 1 transition period.

The exercise served to share information among the various organizations to assure all response efforts are coordinated and communicated effectively to protect public health and safety in the event of a Y2K-initiated event at a nuclear power plant. It also served to refine NRC's Y2K Contingency Plan implementing procedures and prepare for a full-scale Y2K exercise to be conducted October 15.

All 103 operating nuclear power plants have reported their safety systems are Y2K ready. Sixty-eight of them have indicated that all of their systems --safety and non-safety-- are Y2K ready. The remaining 35 plants reported having to complete work on a few non-safety computer systems or devices to be fully Y2K ready.

The "Year 2000" or "Y2K" problem refers to a computers' potential inability to recognize dates beginning with January 1, 2000, and beyond. It arises from computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). For example, computer systems could read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, potentially causing computer systems to malfunction. "Y2K ready" means that functions provided by computer systems will be carried out successfully with the coming of the Year 2000.

A synopsis of the tabletop exercise will be available shortly on the NRC's Y2K website at: www.nrc.gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000.html. The NRC's Y2K Contingency Plan is currently available at this website.

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