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NRC ESTABLISHES PANEL TO EVALUATE PILOT PROGRAM FOR NEW OVERSIGHT PROCESS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has established a panel to independently evaluate and review its new inspection, assessment and enforcement processes now being phased in during a six-month pilot program at eight nuclear power plant sites throughout the country.

The panel will monitor and evaluate the results of the pilot program begun on May 30. It will meet periodically to review data being supplied by NRC licensees on plant performance, as well as the results of NRC's baseline inspection, assessment and enforcement activities.

At the end of the pilot program, the panel will prepare a written report containing the consensus view of the panel, along with any panel member's dissenting views. The NRC staff will use the report to determine whether any changes to the new oversight program are needed before it is fully implemented next year.

The panel's meetings will be open to public observation, with meeting dates announced in advance. A transcript of each meeting will be placed in the NRC's Public Document Room.

The panel will include NRC staff from headquarters and regional offices, a representative of the Nuclear Energy Institute -- the nuclear industry's policy organization -- as well as representatives from licensees participating in the pilot plant program, a representative from a public interest group -- the Union of Concerned Scientists -- and a representative from the Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety.

The pilot plant sites are (1) Hope Creek and Salem 1 and 2, near Wilmington, Delaware, operated by Public Service Electric & Gas; (2) Fitzpatrick, near Oswego, New York, operated by the Power Authority of the State of New York; (3) Shearon Harris, near Raleigh, North Carolina, operated by Carolina Power & Light Co. (4) Sequoyah 1 and 2, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority; (5) Prairie Island 1 and 2, near Minneapolis, Minnesota, operated by Northern States Power Co.; (6) Quad Cities 1 and 2, near Moline, Illinois, operated by Commonwealth Edison Co.; (7) Ft. Calhoun, near Omaha, Nebraska, operated by the Omaha Public Power District; and (8) Cooper, near Nebraska City, Nebraska, operated by the Nebraska Public Power District.

The new program being tested at these plants will include a baseline of inspections common to all nuclear plants. Inspections that go beyond the baseline will be performed when performance drops below a specified threshold. Additional inspections may be done in response to a specific event or problem at a plant.

This new program reflects improvements in the safety, reliability and performance of the nuclear power industry over the past 20 years, as well as the agency's need to regulate the industry effectively with a smaller staff and budget using risk insights in the inspection and assessment process. The NRC is therefore moving to measure nuclear power plant performance using a combination of objective indicators, as well as findings from an inspection program that focuses on plant activities most important to safety and minimizing risk.

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