

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
Internet:opa@nrc.gov

No. 99-268
December 23, 1999

NRC FINDS NO OUTSTANDING Y2K PROBLEMS AT NUCLEAR PLANTS UNDERGOING DECOMMISSIONING

The NRC has completed follow-up onsite reviews of selected nuclear power plants undergoing decommissioning and found no problems with their Y2K program activities.

The primary Year 2000 (Y2K)-related health and safety concern at plants that no longer generate power and are being decommissioned is to assure sufficient cooling and shielding of the spent fuel in water-filled spent fuel pools. Currently, there are 19 permanently shut down nuclear power plants, 14 of which have spent fuel remaining on site.

Starting in early December, NRC reviewed those six facilities that have been shut down in the last four years and thus have the highest level of heat generated from the natural decay of spent fuel. The plants are: Maine Yankee, Millstone 1, Haddam Neck, Big Rock Point, and Zion Units 1 and 2. Reviews covered management controls, staffing, system and component repairs or replacements, and plans for responding to any unexpected event. The remaining eight plants (shut down for more than four years) have spent fuel that generates relatively low levels of heat and can remain in a safe state for three to four weeks, if there is an interruption in the cooling system.

Early this year, the NRC staff contacted all decommissioning reactor licensees and determined that they were addressing Y2K readiness, but no onsite reviews of Y2K activities were conducted. The likelihood of Y2K-related problems causing hazardous conditions at a nuclear power plant undergoing decommissioning is relatively low because heat loads are low, procedures are in place to respond to off-normal situations, and systems in the plant are mostly analog and unaffected by Y2K computer issues. Nevertheless, computer-based systems may be used for some applications such as security, health physics monitoring, or record keeping and such systems could be impacted by a Y2K problem.

To provide added assurance of confidence in the safety of these facilities, the NRC decided to review a selected group of nuclear power plants being decommissioned. NRC reviews confirmed that the licensees for these facilities have adequately addressed Y2K computer issues.

Results of these reviews will be included in the next periodic inspection report for each site and will be available to the public.

#