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NRC STAFF PROPOSES FINE AGAINST BROWNS FERRY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$75,000 civil penalty against the Tennessee Valley Authority for alleged violation of NRC requirements at the Browns Ferry nuclear power plant operated by TVA near Athens, Alabama.

In a Notice of Violation sent to TVA on August 7, 1991, the NRC said the proposed fine was for an event on June 5, 1991, where both Unit 2 drywell personnel access doors were open at the same time for a period of about four hours, resulting in a loss of containment integrity while the reactor's fission process was operating during power ascension tests. The agency said that a mechanical maintenance employee, assigned to operate the personnel access doors for workers entering the drywell to make visual observations during the tests, disarmed the door interlocks at 2:45 a.m. and left the area. The individual informed a general foreman that the doors were open. The general foreman informed a lower level foreman and two teams of test personnel entered and exited the drywell without expressing concern that the doors were open.

The "drywell" at Browns Ferry is a building shaped like a light bulb which serves as the reactor's primary containment. Plant technical specifications require that one of two doors in a personnel access airlock be closed at all times when the fission process is taking place.

NRC officials said that Browns Ferry personnel failed to properly maintain containment integrity, that a trained and qualified maintenance mechanic failed to comply with the procedures for defeating the drywell personnel airlock door interlock, and that TVA failed to develop and implement appropriate procedures to control non-routine containment entry. The NRC also said it was concerned that several significant opportunities were missed to detect and correct the problem.

TVA has 30 days from receipt of the Notice of Violation to either pay the civil penalty or to protest it, in whole or in part.

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