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NRC STAFF ASKS UTILITIES TO TAKE FURTHER STEPS TO ASSURE INTEGRITY OF PRESSURIZED WATER REACTOR STEAM GENERATOR TUBES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is asking utility owners of pressurized water reactors to take further steps to assure that mechanical plugs supplied by Westinghouse Electric Corporation and used in steam generator tubes will not fail under normal, off-normal, or postulated accident conditions.

The request supplements and expands on a similar request made in May 1989 after numerous reports that plugs had cracked, leaked and, in at least one case, failed. Since that time, the staff has received two additional reports of cracked and leaking plugs found in Unit 1 of the Sequoyah nuclear power plant in Tennessee and Unit 2 of the North Anna nuclear power plant in Virginia.

The 1989 request pertained to certain plugs made with an Inconel 60G material. Now, licensees are being asked to repair and replace all mechanical plugs made of that material before they can fail as a result of primary water stress corrosion cracking. They also are being asked to discontinue using plugs made from that material in the future.

Specifically, in addition to discontinuing the use of Inconel 600 plugs, licensees are being asked, among other things, to:

- verify the number of Westinghouse mechanical plugs already installed in steam generator tubes as well as other information about them such as the date of installation and correct existing information as necessary;
- repair or replace, during any refueling or other outage of greater than four weeks that ends 60 days or more after receipt of the staff's Bulletin, all plugs whose estimated lifetime does not extend to the next refueling outage;
- choose a plug repair or replacement program that maintains radiation doses to workers to levels that are as low as is reasonably achievable.

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