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NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE WOLF CREEK \$150,000
FOR APPARENT VIOLATIONS OF NRC REQUIREMENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Wolf Creek Nuclear Operating Corporation (WCNOC) that it proposes to fine the company \$150,000 for violations of NRC quality assurance requirements involving motor-operated valves in safety systems at the Wolf Creek nuclear plant near Burlington, Kansas.

WCNOC has 30 days to pay or protest the civil penalty. If a protest is denied by the NRC staff, WCNOC may ask for a hearing.

Motor-operated valves are used throughout nuclear power plants to control the flow of fluids and gases. Licensees are required to assure that such valves used in safety systems are highly reliable and capable of responding under accident conditions. NRC is basing its civil penalty action on two instances in 1991 when it believes WCNOC failed to deal effectively with problems involving safety-related, motor-operated valves:

(1) In February 1991, plant personnel raised a question about the ability of four emergency cooling system valves to function if they were needed. However, it was near the end of the year before WCNOC completely evaluated the situation, concluded that the valve motors were incapable of working under some accident conditions, and proceeded to replace them.

(2) In May 1991, a contractor audit found numerous deficiencies in Wolf Creek's program for testing and evaluating motor-operated valves. NRC determined in November 1991 that these deficiencies had not been addressed.

In his letter informing WCNOC of the civil penalty, Robert D. Martin, NRC regional administrator in Arlington, Texas, said the first instance "compromised the safety of the plant" because, during the time the conditions went unevaluated, the emergency cooling system valves involved would not have functioned under all accident conditions for which the facility is designed. The second incident, he said, "cast a shadow of uncertainty" over previous motor-operated valve assessments at Wolf Creek.

NRC also is citing WCNOG for two other instances involving motor-operated valves, but is not proposing a civil penalty for them because of the lower safety significance. One concerned a valve which had been subjected to several times its maximum allowable thrust. After NRC raised the issue, WCNOG determined it had not been damaged. The other instance involved finding the cause of the apparent failure of a valve to close completely when remotely operated. In both instances, however, WCNOG did not address the problems until prompted by NRC in November 1991.

Also in his letter, Mr. Martin expressed concern that all these violations indicate a continuation of a documented history of weaknesses in Wolf Creek's corrective action program. He said the company needs to "instill in the Wolf Creek staff a sense of responsibility and an attitude toward safety" that results in prompt and thorough corrective actions when significant or potentially significant deficiencies are found.

He noted that the company corrected all the hardware-related problems relating to motor-operated valves before plant operations resumed in January 1992 following a refueling and maintenance shutdown. He said WCNOG has responded appropriately to the current problems and that the company can successfully achieve more long-term improvements if the corrective program it has outlined to NRC is aggressively implemented.

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