

No. 92-81  
Tel. 301/504-2240

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Friday, May 22, 1992)

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$225,000 FINE AGAINST INDIAN POINT 3  
NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN NEW YORK

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has cited the New York Power Authority (NYPA) for alleged violations found during three separate inspections at Indian Point, Unit 3, at Buchanan, NY. The staff proposes to fine NYPA \$225,000.

The alleged violations were found during NRC inspections conducted between January 5 and March 30 of this year. NRC regulations require licensees to promptly correct any conditions considered adverse to quality, such as failures, deficiencies and deviations. From November 21, 1991, through January 17, 1992, there was a potential for overloading a safety-related, 480-volt emergency electrical distribution device, called a bus, under certain conditions in a loss of coolant accident (LOCA) without a coincident loss of offsite power (LOOP). In a LOCA, which may be caused by a complete break in a large-diameter steam or water pipe, a supply of electric power to drive the large water pumps of the emergency core cooling system would be vital to the plant's safety. Even though the licensee had earlier identified this condition in two separate event reports to the NRC, the condition was not promptly corrected.

In a letter informing NYPA of this enforcement action, Thomas T. Martin, Regional Administrator, NRC Region I, said, "The existence of an overload condition on the emergency buses, in the event of a LOCA without a LOOP, could have eventually resulted in an overcurrent trip (opening) of the emergency bus supply breakers and the overcurrent trip would lock out the associated emergency diesel generator output breakers." This would have prevented the emergency diesel generators from automatically sending electric power to equipment dependent on that power, "significantly impacting your ability to mitigate the consequence of the accident," Mr. Martin said.

The normal fine for such a violation is \$50,000. However, in this case it was increased by 50 percent, to \$75,000, because NYPA has been cited for inadequate corrective actions a number of times over the past two years.



On March 19, an NRC inspector identified a second set of violations, involving the failure of plant operators to take required actions when the plant is operated outside the limits set in technical specifications of its NRC license. In this case, the plant was operated while a portion of the boric acid heat tracing system was inoperable. The heat tracing system uses electric heating elements to warm the piping from the boric acid tank to the reactor. If the boric acid solution in the pipe is allowed to cool, then the boric acid would crystallize out of solution and the crystals could clog the system. Although technical specifications require the operators to reduce power to hot shutdown when this system is not operable, the plant remained at 100 percent power. In addition, control room operators failed to properly respond to an alarm in the control room that indicated there might be a problem with the heat tracing system. NYPA also has been cited for failing to correct long standing deficiencies in the boric acid heat trace system.

To that point, Mr. Martin said in his letter, "The NRC has significant regulatory concern regarding this event, and its associated violations, since it was fortuitous that this event did not result in any of the boric acid lines being unavailable due to blockage from the precipitation of boron. The failure to maintain the operability of the boric acid heat trace system, and to respond to the deteriorating conditions of the systems, demonstrates a programmatic breakdown in your staff's ability to identify and respond to degraded plant conditions."

The fine for such a violation is normally \$50,000. It was increased by 200 percent, to \$150,000, because the violations were identified by the NRC, and not the licensee, because of corrective action problems identified in the past two years, and because the duration of the problem provided an opportunity for NYPA to identify and correct this problem prior to March 19.

NYPA now has 30 days to either pay the proposed fine or to request in writing that all or part of it be withdrawn, giving reasons for any such request. It also has 30 days to admit or deny the alleged violations, to give reasons for them, if admitted, to describe the actions it has taken or plans to take to prevent their happening in the future, and to give the date by which it will be in full compliance with NRC requirements.

The State of New York has been notified of this enforcement action.

#