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NRC STAFF FINES BG&E $50,000 FOR TWO ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF NRC REQUIREMENTS AT ITS CALVERT CLIFFS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has cited Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BG&E) for failing to promptly correct and identify a violation of NRC requirements and for failing to ensure adequate emergency core cooling system (ECCS) performance in case of an accident at its Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant, near Lusby, MD. The staff proposes a $50,000 fine.

The violations were found during an Electrical Distribution System Functional Inspection (EDSFI) at Calvert Cliffs Units 1 and 2 between March 2 and April 3, 1992. The primary objective of an EDSFI is to assess the capability of the electrical distribution system in the plant during all normal plant operations and during accident conditions. During the EDSFI, inspectors found that there were some questions about how well the emergency core cooling system would perform if a loss-of-coolant accident happened at the same time as a loss of off-site power. A loss of coolant accident involves losing cooling water from the reactor vessel or associated pumps and piping, because of a break in a pipe, a stuck-open pressure relief valve or failure of seals in a reactor coolant pump.

When there is a loss of off-site power, emergency diesel generators (EDGs) start automatically to provide power to emergency core cooling system pumps, in place of the normal off-site power supply. Devices called "load sequencers" gradually add electric loads to the EDGs to assure that the loads remain within the power output capabilities of the EDGs. The EDSFI found a problem in the load sequencers, which would allow two large electrical loads to be automatically connected to the EDGs at the same time. This problem could cause an unacceptable drop in EDG output voltage that supplies the emergency core cooling systems. That could prevent these systems from supplying adequate cooling water to keep the nuclear fuel in the reactor safely covered with water.

NRC regulations require licensees to promptly correct any conditions considered adverse to quality, such as this one. The regulations also require licensees to test and evaluate the ECCS to ensure it will perform adequately under accident conditions.

This problem was first found by BG&E in 1987. And, after looking into the situation, the Plant Operating Event Assessment Committee (POEAC) and the Plant Operations and Safety Review Committee (POSRC) determined no further action was required because, while calculations showed the voltage would drop, the safety committees decided the probability of reactor damage was insignificant.

The BG&E staff looked into the situation again after the NRC EDSFI brought it up in 1992. After that evaluation, BG&E declared all three EDGs inoperable and shut down both units.

In a letter to the utility, Thomas T. Martin, Regional Administrator, NRC Region I, said, "The NRC is particularly concerned that the safety and regulatory significance of this issue was not recognized by your safety review committees (POEAC and POSRC) when this condition was initially identified to them in March, 1987, and that adequate corrective actions were not taken and no report was made to the NRC until this issue was identified by the NRC EDSFI team. When the electrical system vulnerability was first identified, the need to evaluate the effect on the ECCS system performance should have been recognized by your staff."

BG&E now has 30 days either to 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 Maryland has been notified of this enforcement action.

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