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**NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$50,000 FINE AGAINST COMMONWEALTH EDISON COMPANY
FOR VIOLATING NRC REQUIREMENTS AT BRAIDWOOD NUCLEAR PLANT**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$50,000 fine against Commonwealth Edison Company for operating the Braidwood Nuclear Power plant with a valve in a safety system locked shut for a 16-month period when it should have been open.

The valve was part of a vent system which could be used to remove gases from the top of the reactor vessel. The vent system was not needed during the 16-month period when the valve was locked shut.

Plant personnel discovered the situation March 11, 1993, when Unit 2 was in a refueling outage. Personnel, while draining reactor coolant from the system, found that a valve at the top of the reactor was in the closed and locked position.

This valve is common to two vent paths at the top of the reactor and is required to be in the open and locked position during reactor operations. The closed valve caused both vent paths to be inoperable should it have been necessary to have used them.

Although the closed valve rendered both of the safety system's vent paths inoperable, there were a number of alternate methods available to remove gases from the top of the reactor vessel, had that been necessary.

If the vent system is inoperable, the unit must be shut down within 30 days. The NRC has cited Commonwealth Edison for failing to do so. The company's review of the incident indicated that the valve had been locked shut during the previous refueling outage which occurred in November 1991.

The NRC recognized that the company took immediate and long-term corrective actions to restore and maintain the system to an operating mode once the violation was identified.

"To emphasize the importance of maintaining proper control of the valve alignment of important plant systems, especially for valves that could render multiple flow paths inoperable, I have decided...to issue (a civil penalty) in the amount of \$50,000," NRC Regional Administrator A. Bert Davis wrote in a letter to Commonwealth notifying company personnel of the violations.

The utility has until June 21 to pay the fine or protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the utility may request a hearing.

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