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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$150,000 FINE FOR VIOLATIONS  
OF AGENCY REQUIREMENTS AT WISCONSIN NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$150,000 fine against Wisconsin Electric Power Company for violations associated with steam line valves at Unit 2 of the Point Beach nuclear power station.

The violations were identified in a special NRC inspection October 1 - November 1, 1991, to review the failure of the Unit 2 main steam isolation valves to close when the plant was being shut down for a scheduled refueling outage.

The main steam isolation valves are in the steam lines from the plant's steam generators to the turbine. Under normal conditions, the steam in the lines is not radioactively contaminated.

The main steam isolation valves are typically closed only during a plant shutdown, but they might be required to close under certain accident conditions to prevent the flow of radioactive gases through the steam lines out of the reactor containment or to close off a possible steam leak.

NRC inspectors determined that plant personnel routinely used a sledge hammer to jar the valves if they did not close upon demand during routine shutdowns. This practice had been followed for both units at the Point Beach plant since they began operations in the early 1970s.

Reactor operators did not document some of the problems encountered in closing the valves and effective corrective actions were not taken to assure that the valves would work if called upon.

The utility was cited for:

-- Failing to report to the NRC the failure of two main steam isolation valves to close during the Unit 2 shutdown on

September 29, 1991, and for failing to report instances when a valve failed to fully close in 1987, 1989 and 1990.

-- Inadequately testing the operability of the valves on September 29, 1991.

-- Failing to adequately determine the cause of the valve failures in 1987, 1989 and 1990 and to take effective corrective action to preclude repetition of the failures.

In notifying the utility of the fine, NRC Regional Administrator A. Bert Davis stated: "Of particular concern to the NRC is that throughout the operational history of the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station, the valves repeatedly failed to function [properly]...and station management failed to adequately address the potential significance of this problem, which was generally known to the operations and maintenance staff."

Wisconsin Electric has until February 10, 1992, to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the utility may request a hearing.

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