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NRC ASKS INSPECTOR GENERAL
TO EXAMINE INTRUSIVENESS CONCERNS

Chairman Ivan Selin has requested the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of Inspector General (OIG) to provide an independent assessment of the agency's regional regulatory program in light of questions raised by the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO), an industry self-regulatory group, about whether the NRC has been unduly intrusive in basic management decisions.

The NRC has conducted self-evaluations in the past, using broad industry surveys, after similar issues had been raised. This time the Commission has decided to take advantage of the OIG's resources and independent perspective for its assessment.

The Commission, concerned about performance at certain nuclear power plants, fully expects the NRC staff to be aggressive in seeking out the ultimate root causes of deficiencies, whether in engineering, training, equipment, materials or utility management. When the NRC identifies weaknesses or shortcomings that can affect the public's health or safety, it is then up to the utility to correct them promptly.

There is increasing evidence that what separates the good performing plants from the marginal ones is management. There are times, therefore, when the NRC, finding weaknesses in safety performance, will conclude that improvements in management are needed to rectify the situation. It is then the utility's responsibility to determine what steps may be needed to correct management shortcomings, and to implement these steps.

In actual practice, the line between aggressive regulation and undue intrusion can be difficult to define with precision. Since INPO has raised questions anew about what the industry regards as NRC intrusiveness, the Chairman has decided to request the OIG review.

INPO's membership consists of all utilities in the United States which hold NRC licenses to operate nuclear power plants.

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