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NRC STAFF DIRECTS LICENSEES TO TAKE  
ACTIONS ON CERTAIN FIRE BARRIER SYSTEMS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has directed utilities licensed to operate nuclear power plants to take certain actions with regard to Thermo-Lag 330 fire barrier systems that may be installed in their facilities.

The staff is acting on the basis of its conclusion that some Thermo-Lag 330 fire barrier systems do not provide the level of protection required by the NRC's regulations. The regulations, in part, require that licensees ensure that one train of the electrical cabling and components used to safely shut down nuclear power plants remain free from possible fire damage.

This can be done by separating the primary shutdown train from a redundant one by a fire barrier, such as physical separation, capable of preventing a fire in one train from damaging the other for a period of three hours. Alternatively, a redundant shutdown train can be enclosed in a fire barrier capable of preventing damage for a period of one hour if fire detection and suppression equipment are present.

In August 1991, the staff issued an Information Notice advising licensees that Thermo-Lag fire barrier material had failed some fire endurance tests performed by Gulf States Utilities Company. Later the same year, another Information Notice was issued advising of deficiencies in procedures for installing Thermo-Lag fire material provided by its vendor, Thermal Science, Inc. And, on June 23 this year, a third Information Notice advised licensees that the material had failed fire endurance tests performed by Texas Utilities for its Comanche Peak nuclear power plant.

Based on these concerns, the staff believes that utility licensees should take steps to further assure that the level of fire protection for the safe shutdown capability in their nuclear power plants meets the high standards required by the NRC's regulations.

Accordingly, licensees are being directed to immediately:

1) Identify those areas in their plants where Thermo-Lag 330 fire barrier material is installed and determine the areas which use this material for protecting either small diameter conduit or wide (widths greater than 14 inches) trays that provide safe shutdown capability.

2) In those plant areas where Thermo-Lag fire barriers are used to protect wide cable trays, small conduits or both, implement appropriate compensatory measures such as the use of fire watches.

3) Advise the NRC staff, within 30 days, of whether Thermo-Lag 330 fire barrier systems are installed in their plants and, if so, whether it has taken compensatory actions and describe the measures being taken to ensure that fire barrier operability is in compliance with NRC requirements.

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