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**NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE GULF STATES UTILITIES \$75,000
FOR VIOLATIONS AT RIVER BEND STATION**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Gulf States Utilities that it proposes to fine the company \$75,000 for operating its River Bend Station more than six years with a post-accident safety system inoperable. The station is located 24 miles north northwest of Baton Route, LA.

Gulf States has 30 days to pay the civil penalty or to protest it. If a protest is denied, the company may ask for a hearing.

Involved in this enforcement action is the plant's hydrogen mixing system. It would be needed if the facility had a loss-of-coolant accident that damaged fuel cladding and generated hydrogen inside the containment as the result of a metal-water chemical reaction.

To keep hydrogen from reaching flammable limits in such a situation, the hydrogen mixing system dilutes concentrations of the gas by exhausting it from the atmosphere in the drywell (an inner structure where the reactor vessel is located) out into the larger primary containment atmosphere.

Gulf States notified NRC on September 18 of this year that it had discovered that both trains of the River Bend hydrogen mixing system were inoperable. An NRC inspection September 19-24 confirmed Gulf States' findings that wiring errors would have prevented the system from performing its safety function. NRC also confirmed that this condition had existed since the plant began operations in July 1985.

If operators had tried to start up the system during accident conditions before the inoperability was discovered in September of this year, outlet valves would have closed and kept the system from functioning. It would have taken operator intervention to override the controls disabled by the wiring errors.

In his letter informing Gulf States of the civil penalty, Robert D. Martin, NRC regional administrator in Arlington, Texas, called it "indeed commendable" that a Gulf States contract employee found the problem during a biennial procedure review, when it would have been unlikely to discover a flaw of this sort. Mr. Martin further agreed with the utility that, under most

circumstances, plant operators would have recognized the system's inoperability and been able to deal with it before hydrogen concentrations exceeded flammable limits.

He also acknowledged that, once the condition was found, Gulf States promptly began an orderly plant shutdown, reported the matter to NRC and restored the system to operability. Mr. Martin said Gulf States has described to NRC a long-term corrective action program which includes plans to check other systems for potential wiring problems.

But he said the situation nevertheless amounted to a significant violation of NRC requirements. The base civil penalty for a violation of this sort was increased from \$50,000 to \$75,000 because of the length of time the condition existed, and because Gulf States missed opportunities to discover the wiring errors during design modification and pre-operational testing before plant startup.

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