

No. 92-190  
Tel. 301/504-2240

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Tuesday, Dec. 29, 1992)

NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE GULF STATES UTILITIES  
\$100,000 FOR VIOLATIONS AT RIVER BEND STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Gulf States Utilities (GSU) that it proposes to fine the company \$100,000 for violations of NRC radiation protection requirements at the River Bend Station near St. Francisville, Louisiana.

GSU has 30 days to respond to the NRC citation. During that time, it may pay the civil penalty or protest it. If a protest is denied, the company may ask for a hearing.

NRC is basing this enforcement action on findings from inspections conducted in response to two incidents which occurred in the fall of 1992 while River Bend was shut down for refueling.

The first, which GSU personnel discovered on October 1, involved the mislabeling of a plastic bag containing low-level radioactive waste. A tag on this bag indicated that radiation levels on contact were less than two millirem per hour, when surveys showed the levels actually to be as high as 14,000 millirem per hour. (NRC regulations limit exposures for radiation workers to 3,000 millirem per calendar quarter. NRC found no indication of an overexposure in this case.)

The second incident was the release from the plant site of a piece of scrap steel, slightly contaminated with radioactive material. It was sent to a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, scrap iron facility, where it was discovered on October 19. GSU confirmed that it originated at River Bend and returned it to the plant.

As the result of the inspection scheduled in response to these events, NRC has cited GSU for 16 violations of NRC radiation safety requirements, many of them related to the scrap steel and mislabeled bag incidents. A number of them were discovered by GSU during its own investigation. NRC's enforcement action is based on eight instances of failure to perform required radiation surveys; five instances of failure to follow radiation protection procedures specified in the plant

license; two instances of a failure to supply radiation monitoring equipment to workers in appropriate circumstances; and one instance of radioactively contaminated material being transferred to an unauthorized recipient.

In his letter informing GSU of the proposed fine, James L. Milhoan, NRC regional administrator in Arlington, Texas, took note of both short-term and long-term corrective measures GSU either has taken or has under way to eliminate weaknesses in its radiation protection program. He also acknowledged that it does not appear that the violations that were found resulted in overexposures to individual workers.

Nevertheless, Mr. Milhoan added, the situation posed the potential for exceeding the exposure limits because, in NRC's view, the violations "represent a breakdown in the controls that are essential to the prevention of significant radiation exposures and to the control of radioactive material." He noted that earlier problems have occurred in the River Bend radiation protection area, one of which brought about a \$37,500 NRC fine in June 1991.

#