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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$50,000 FINE AGAINST WISCONSIN ELECTRIC
FOR VIOLATIONS OF NRC REQUIREMENTS AT POINT BEACH NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$50,000 fine against Wisconsin Electric Power Company for two violations of NRC requirements during maintenance on the Unit 1 steam generators at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station in May 1992. The reactor was shut down at the time of the maintenance.

During the steam generator maintenance the temperature in the reactor cooling system was allowed to drop 140 degrees Fahrenheit in an hour, exceeding the NRC limit of 100 degrees per hour. The limit is intended to protect the reactor vessel from stress caused by the significant changes in temperature. This incident was of minor safety significance, however, because the limit provides substantial safety margins for temperature changes over the operating life of the plant.

The procedure used by plant operators in setting up the maintenance was faulty and was not capable of maintaining the cooldown rate within limits.

"The NRC recognizes that the event had minor safety significance regarding the integrity of the reactor vessel," stated A. Bert Davis, NRC Regional Administrator in notifying the utility of the fine. "However, the event is considered significant due to the lack of adequate management oversight, poor communications, lack of training specific to the evolution, procedural problems associated with controlling the cooldown rate, and poor operator performance."

The company was cited for exceeding the cooldown rate and for use of an inadequate procedure.

Steam generators are large cylindrical tanks which produce steam to drive the turbine-generator which produces electricity at a nuclear plant. Inside the steam generator are thousands of small pipes which carry heated water from the reactor. Water in the steam generator flows over the pipes, boils and produces the steam.

The maintenance work involved cleaning of the steam production portion of the steam generators. Heated water was pumped through the inner pipes, causing the surrounding water to boil. The boiling action was intended to remove corrosion products and other materials.

Wisconsin Electric has until September 3, 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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