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NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE ENTERGY OPERATIONS \$25,000  
FOR APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT WATERFORD PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Entergy Operations Inc. that it proposes to fine the company \$25,000 for apparent violations of NRC requirements at Unit 3 of the Waterford Steam Electric Station, 20 miles west of New Orleans.

Entergy Operations has 30 days to respond to the 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 taking this action as the result of information gathered during an inspection conducted September 14-October 7 at the plant and during an enforcement conference with Entergy Operations officials held November 3 at the NRC Region IV office in Arlington, Texas.

The specific problem involved was the inoperability of a key valve which must open on an actuation signal for one of two redundant containment spray system trains to function. If a large reactor cooling system pipe broke, this safety system would spray water from the top of the plant containment building interior to reduce the steam pressure buildup that would result from such an accident. Both of the system's redundant trains -- Train A and Train B -- are required to be operable. If one becomes inoperable, it must be restored to operability within 72 hours or steps must be taken to begin a plant shutdown.

On September 13, during testing by Waterford plant employees, this key containment spray system valve failed to open because of an abnormally high pressure level in a piping system. As a result, Entergy Operations personnel declared the system's Train A inoperable. They then retested it and declared it operable again. But after a more complete analysis, the company again declared it inoperable on September 25, later requesting a plant license amendment to permit that valve to be kept open so the containment spray would operate if needed. NRC approved the request on September 30. In the meantime, NRC also had begun a special inspection to look into the circumstances of the valve's failure to open.

During the November 3 enforcement conference, Entergy Operations informed NRC that this same valve apparently had failed to open last February 1 under circumstances virtually identical to those on September 13. In February, a mechanic apparently got the valve to operate in a second test after striking the valve body with a hammer. NRC also learned that the incident was not pursued in detail in February because of an assumption that the valve stem needed lubrication and because the unexpectedly high pipeline pressure was not recognized.

Based on this information, NRC has concluded that this key valve was effectively inoperable from February 1 to September 30, rendering Train A of the containment spray system inoperable for the same time period. The agency has further concluded that Entergy Operations personnel did not promptly identify and correct the problem, particularly when it occurred in February.

In his letter informing Entergy Operations of the fine, James L. Milhoan, NRC regional administrator, agreed that the safety significance of this matter was mitigated by the redundancy in the containment spray system and other plant design features. Entergy Operations' analysis indicates that Train B of the spray system would have functioned. It further indicated that it was unlikely that the containment structure would have failed during a loss-of-coolant accident even if no containment spray had been available.

Nevertheless, Mr. Milhoan said, the situation constitutes a significant regulatory concern to NRC because of "the failure of licensee personnel to be sensitive to problems that threatened the operability of a safety system and the consequences of that failure."

Entergy Operations' analysis attributed the high pipeline pressure to a design flaw which caused air to be entrained in the piping upstream of the valve involved. Mr. Milhoan noted that the company has begun broad efforts to resolve the hardware, personnel and organizational problems that contributed to the incidents. The company's evaluation and prompt corrective measures caused the proposed fine to be half the base civil penalty for a violations of this severity.