

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: RIII-97-08
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January 27, 1997

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$50,000 FINE AGAINST NORTHERN STATES POWER COMPANY
FOR A VIOLATION OF NRC REQUIREMENTS AT PRAIRIE ISLAND STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$50,000 fine against Northern States Power Company for failing to analyze the safety implications when changes were made to the utility's two-unit Prairie Island Station at Red Wing, Minnesota.

The changes affected procedures relating to a system which, in certain accidents, would draw water from the Mississippi River to cool emergency equipment such as safety-related pumps. At Prairie Island, the system is designed so that this river water would flow through an intake pipe built to withstand an earthquake.

A test by Northern States Power in November 1995 found that, if an earthquake damaged a down river lock and dam which resulted in low river levels, cooling water flow might be inadequate. To compensate for such a situation, the utility modified its operating procedures to place more reliance on action by control room operators, and assumed that adequate cooling water would be supplied through a non-earthquake-resistant intake canal.

NRC follow-up inspections in December 1995 and last November, however, found that these changes raised new safety questions which Northern States Power neither adequately analyzed nor submitted to the NRC for evaluation and possible amendments of the plant's licenses.

In his letter informing the utility of the fine, NRC Regional Administrator A. Bill Beach said both key changes — increased reliance on operator actions and use of a non-seismically qualified intake canal — introduced the potential for accidents different from those evaluated when the plant was first licensed.

The NRC staff has reviewed Northern States Power's planned corrective actions and found them adequate for the short term. Further review, however, is needed to determine if the actions are acceptable as a permanent resolution.

Northern States Power Company has until February 21 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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