

No. 94-12  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Friday, January 21, 1994)

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$187,500 FINE FOR ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF NRC REQUIREMENTS AT VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN VERNON, VT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has cited Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation for several alleged violations of NRC regulations at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, in Vernon, VT. The staff has proposed a \$187,500 fine.

The first three alleged violations are the result of an Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) inspection on September 10 to 14, 1993, to look into the safety implications of two fuel handling incidents at the plant. The first incident happened on September 3, when a fuel assembly was dropped approximately eight feet into its reactor core position during fuel handling. The second event happened on September 9, when operators inadvertently lowered a fuel assembly onto the reactor internals, and did not subsequently stop all refueling activities as the plant's procedures require. The AIT found that the Refuel Platform Operators had been repeatedly violating procedures throughout the refueling outage, and that this was caused by a significant weakness in management oversight.

The staff has cited Vermont Yankee for operators failing to adhere to written procedures for refueling, for management's failing to identify and correct conditions considered adverse to quality, (in this case, moving fuel without following procedures is considered a condition adverse to quality), and for the failure of supervisors to hold briefings prior to refueling activities.

In a letter to Vermont Yankee, Thomas T. Martin, Regional Administrator, NRC Region I, said, "While the NRC recognizes that there was no apparent damage to the fuel or the core internals, the potential exists for such damage whenever fuel is not properly handled. Further, given the widespread nature of the violations, particularly with respect to the failure to follow procedures, as well as management's failure to identify and correct these problems sooner, these violations represent a significant regulatory concern." For these alleged violations, the staff has proposed a \$87,500 fine.

The normal fine for such a violation is \$50,000. It was increased by 100 percent because of the multiple examples of the alleged violations and then mitigated by 25 percent because of Vermont Yankee's comprehensive corrective actions.

The second alleged violation was found by Vermont Yankee and reported to the NRC in October 1993. It involved a buildup of silt and debris in the alternate cooling tower basin and suction pit, which left the system inoperable, possibly since 1989. NRC inspectors looked into the problem during a special inspection in November 1993. The Alternate Cooling Tower is a backup heat removal system in the event that water cannot be drawn from the Connecticut River by the service water pumps. It uses a large volume of water stored in the basin of the West Cooling Tower. It would be used to provide cooling water to critical plant components such as the emergency diesel generators and the Residual Heat Removal system heat exchangers. Following limited licensee inspections in 1990 and 1992, Vermont Yankee cleaned only portions of the pit, and did not ensure that the system was operable.

Vermont Yankee was cited for failing to have operable alternate cooling tower while the reactor was operating.

For this violation, the staff has proposed a \$100,000 fine. The base civil penalty is \$50,000. It was increased by 100 percent because the licensee had the opportunity to identify the problem in 1990 and 1992, but did not.

Vermont Yankee has 30 days either to pay the proposed fine or to request in writing that part or all of it be withdrawn. The company also has 30 days to admit or deny the alleged violations, to describe the actions it has taken or plans to take to prevent their happening in the future, and to give the date by which it expects to be in full compliance with NRC requirements.

The State of Vermont was informed of this enforcement action.

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