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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC STAFF TO MEET WITH OFFICIALS OF DUQUESNE LIGHT COMPANY
TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT BEAVER VALLEY NUCLEAR PLANT

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with officials of Duquesne Light Company Thursday to discuss apparent violations at the utility's Beaver Valley nuclear power plant in Shippingport, Pa. The predecisional enforcement conference will begin at 10 a.m. at the NRC's Region 1 office in King of Prussia, Pa. It will be open to the public for observation only.

Violations to be discussed include the inoperability of two reactor coolant system pressure relief valves for an extended period of time in the plant's Unit 1, as well as deficiencies associated with leak sealant injection repairs in the Unit 2 reactor head vent system.

In the case of the first violation, the NRC found, during an inspection conducted at the plant from September 29 to November 16, 1996, that Unit 1 operated with two pressurizer power-operated relief valve block valves in the shut position for several years. Despite the fact that this was contrary to plant design, no safety evaluation was performed to support this change. What's more, plant employees missed several chances between 1981 and 1996 to identify the problem, assess the associated risk significance and correct the situation.

The second violation -- the sealant repair flaws -- was discovered during an inspection conducted from November 17 to December 21, 1996. Work activity controls related to the temporary leak injection repair on the Unit 2 reactor vessel head vent system were determined by the NRC to be inadequate. The agency identified significant weaknesses in work instruction procedures, quality control involvement, sealant material selection and vendor oversight. These problems were significant because they had the potential to render the head vent system inoperable in the ensuing operational cycle.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean the NRC has determined that a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide the licensee an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the licensee to outline its proposed corrective actions. No decision on the apparent violations will be made at this conference. Those decisions will be made by senior NRC officials at a later time.

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