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COOPER NUCLEAR STATION RATED 'GOOD' IN THREE AREAS
'ACCEPTABLE' IN THE FOURTH IN NRC ASSESSMENT REPORT

Cooper Nuclear Station, a nuclear power plant near Brownville, Nebraska, received performance ratings of "good" in plant operations, maintenance and plant support, and "acceptable" in engineering in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest systematic assessment of licensee performance (SALP) for the facility.

The SALP report was sent February 14 to the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), which operates the plant. The report evaluates the plant's performance from July 9, 1995, through January 11, 1997.

NRC and NPPD officials will discuss the report during a meeting set for 9 a.m. Wednesday, March 5, at Cooper Nuclear Station. The meeting will be open for public observation. NRC officials will be available afterwards to speak with reporters, state and local officials, and members of the public.

NRC systematic assessment reports rate licensees in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support -- and assign ratings of Category 1, 2, or 3 depending on whether their performance in those areas was superior, good or acceptable. Cooper was given the following scores on the current SALP and the previous SALP in July 1995:

| <u>Functional areas & ratings</u> | <u>Current</u> | <u>Previous</u> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Plant Operations | 2 | 2 |
| Maintenance | 2 | 3 |
| Engineering | 3 | 3 |
| Plant Support | 2 | 2 |

In his cover letter to the report, NRC Regional Administrator L. Joe Callan said, "Overall, safety performance at the Cooper Nuclear Station was improved somewhat from the last assessment period but remained a concern."

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"In the operations area, you demonstrated a conservative operating philosophy. Good operator performance was noted during routine evolutions, but procedure adherence declined

during stressful situations and recurring command, control, and supervisory oversight deficiencies were apparent," Mr. Callan said.

In the maintenance area, the improved rating was attributed to improved surveillance testing and problem identification programs and overall good material conditions at the plant, Mr. Callan noted. Problems were noted in the implementation of the NRC's maintenance rule and with some work packages that were not compatible with plant conditions.

"Continued weaknesses were noted in the engineering area," Mr. Callan said. These led to ineffectiveness in resolving problems. However, Mr. Callan praised a recent self-assessment of engineering performance, which was "an excellent effort that identified your limited progress in correcting long-standing problems."

Mr. Callan said, in the plant support area, that physical security was excellent and improvement was noted in radiological controls, especially in efforts to maintain radiation exposures as low as reasonably achievable.

"The NRC recognizes your efforts to improve performance at all levels, as evidenced by increased self-identification of problems," Mr. Callan said. "However, you have yet to fully demonstrate the ability to develop and implement lasting corrective actions for identified deficiencies in some areas, most notably in the engineering area," he concluded.