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NRC, APS OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS
APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT PALO VERDE PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold a predecisional enforcement conference this week with officials of the Arizona Public Service Co. to discuss two apparent violations related to fires on April 4 at the three-unit Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, about 50 miles west of Phoenix.

The conference will be at 1 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 1, at the NRC Region IV office in Arlington, Texas. The meeting will be open to the public for observation; NRC officials will be available afterwards for questions.

A fire which brought the apparent violations to light was detected at about 5 p.m. on April 4 when an APS employee smelled smoke from the back panel area of the Unit 2 control room. At about the same time, a second fire was discovered in a Unit 2 battery equipment room. Both fires were promptly extinguished. At the time, Unit 2 was shut down for a refueling outage.

The fires resulted from an electrical fault in a transformer in the battery equipment room. The fire in the control room occurred because grounding protection that by design should have been located in the battery equipment room was actually located in the control room. The condition has been corrected by locating the ground in the battery equipment room.

An NRC inspection found that APS had failed to ensure that two independent electrical distribution systems, called Train A and Train B, which are designed to achieve safe shutdown and maintain the plant in that condition, were adequately protected from a fire in the Train B battery equipment room. A fire in that room could have impacted both trains of safe shutdown equipment.

The inspection also found that APS had not ensured that commitments made as the plant was designed were translated into construction requirements as the plant was built.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that NRC has made a final determination that violations did occur or that enforcement action, such as a monetary fine, will be taken. The purpose is to discuss the apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide APS an opportunity to challenge or correct portions of the inspection report; and for the licensee to outline its corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violations or any enforcement action will be made at the conference. Those decisions will be made later by senior NRC officials.

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