

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
Internet: opa@nrc.gov

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NRC BEGINS FIRST OF A SERIES OF DESIGN INSPECTIONS AT NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a series of special design inspections to verify that selected nuclear power plants are operating under the terms and conditions of their licenses and NRC regulations.

A six-member team began the first of the series this week at the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant in Florida. The second will begin shortly at Three Mile Island Unit 1 in Pennsylvania, and the third at Washington Nuclear Project-2 in the State of Washington. Similar inspections will be performed periodically over the next two years at other plants.

Inspections will focus on reviews of the plants' original design and configuration, and conformance with the licensees' safety analysis report. Each inspection team will be made up of engineers from NRC and design specialists from either Stone & Webster or Sargent & Lundy, architect/engineering firms with which NRC has contracted.

NRC has planned these inspections as a result of recent findings that licensees at the Millstone plant in Connecticut and at other facilities routinely performed full-core offloads during refueling outages without performing the necessary safety evaluation. It also was discovered that other facilities' actual as-built configuration or operations were inconsistent with the design basis information described in their licenses.

Plants have been selected for inspection based upon several factors, including: Systematic Analysis of Licensee Performance ratings for the engineering area, placement on the NRC "watch list" of plants requiring increased attention, design review programs, and previous NRC design inspections. Special care will be taken to avoid having inspections performed by representatives of the architectural/engineering firm which originally designed a power plant.

The design inspections will last eight weeks each. A written report will be available approximately 45 days after each inspection is completed.

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