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No. 96-16

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Friday, January 26, 1996)

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$50,000 FINE FOR DIABLO CANYON

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. that it proposes to fine the utility \$50,000 for apparent violations of NRC requirements at the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant near Avila Beach, Calif.

An NRC inspection determined that several procedures were violated when PG&E personnel failed to remove an electrical grounding device called a ground buggy before restoring power to a Unit 1 electrical bus. A bus is an assembly of conductors that distributes electricity to various loads, and a ground buggy is a temporary grounding device designed to protect workers from electrocution during electrical maintenance. The ground buggy caused a short and resultant surge of electrical current to an auxiliary transformer, which blew apart and caught fire.

The event occurred on Oct. 21, while Unit 1 was shut down for a refueling outage, and resulted in the temporary loss of off-site power to Unit 1. Emergency diesel generators automatically started, as designed, and restored power to vital electrical loads. Unit 2 was not affected.

``Thus, although some safety systems were interrupted, i.e., spent fuel pool and shutdown cooling, and other safety systems were challenged, the event itself did not result in the safety of the facility being compromised,' ' L. Joe Callan, Regional Administrator of NRC Region IV in Arlington, TX, said in a letter informing PG&E of the NRC action.

An NRC inspection on various dates between Oct. 21 and Dec. 8 found that one of the primary root causes of the event was PG&E's lack of effective procedures to assure adequate control of the installation and removal of ground buggies. Neither the operations nor maintenance departments at Diablo Canyon had assumed responsibility for ensuring that ground buggies were removed, Mr. Callan said.

Contributing causes included a failure to follow existing procedures and work instructions, and a failure to take effective preventive steps following an earlier, less-serious ground buggy

event in October 1994, Mr. Callan said. (The 1994 event involved the failure to remove a grounding device from an emergency diesel generator prior to conducting post-maintenance testing, resulting in an inability to electrically load the emergency diesel generator and conduct the test until the device was removed).

In his letter to PG&E, Mr. Callan said, ``[T]he NRC views these violations collectively as a breakdown in the control of licensed activities which in this case resulted in a potentially significant event and an unnecessary challenge to plant safety systems.''

Mr. Callan noted that both Diablo Canyon personnel and plant systems responded reasonably well to the event, and that management had taken prompt and comprehensive long-term actions to prevent a similar occurrence.

The \$50,000 civil penalty proposed is the base amount for a Severity Level III problem, as the NRC classified this event. NRC enforcement policy outlines four severity levels, Level IV being the least serious.

PG&E has 30 days to respond to the NRC's citation, during which time it may pay the civil penalty or protest it. If the protest is denied, the utility may ask for a hearing.

While it was not found to be a contributing factor to the Oct. 21 ground buggy event, the NRC also cited PG&E for routinely violating a technical specification that prohibits certain individuals from working more than 72 hours in a seven-day period during extended periods of shutdown for refueling. The violation was classified as Severity Level IV and not assessed a civil penalty.

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