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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC PROPOSES \$210,000 FINE FOR PENNSYLVANIA UTILITY  
FOR SEVERAL ALLEGED VIOLATIONS AT SUSQUEHANNA PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a \$210,000 fine against Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. for several alleged violations of agency guidelines at the utility's Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Berwick, Pa. The alleged infractions fall into two major areas: the misalignment of a circuit breaker for an emergency diesel generator that left it inoperable, and plant operators' repeated failure to detect this problem; and the improper deactivation of a containment isolation valve.

PP&L also has been cited, but not fined, for a non-licensed operator's failure to follow administrative procedures relating to an emergency reactor shutdown system.

As a result of reports made by PP&L to the NRC, agency staff identified the alleged violations during two inspections conducted at the plant between June 11 and September 9, 1996, as well as through two investigations conducted by the agency's Office of Investigations.

With respect to the emergency diesel generator alleged violations, commercial nuclear power plants are required to have multiple backup energy sources so that in the event of a loss of power, the reactor can be safely shutdown. Susquehanna, which has two reactors, is required to have four emergency diesel generators available for that purpose. Nevertheless, on June 14, 1996, non-licensed plant operators failed to detect a misalignment of a diesel generator auxiliary equipment supply breaker, which rendered that generator inoperable.

The problem was not identified during three subsequent weekly equipment checks. All told, the generator was out of service for almost three weeks. However, in their equipment test records, the operators incorrectly reported that the circuit breaker was in the appropriate position.

Further, alarm tests that were supposed to have been done during rounds by the non-licensed operators were listed as having

been performed when in many cases that did not occur. The operators failed to perform the required panel alarm tests on approximately 157 occasions between January and June 1996.

NRC found that some licensed operators did not perform certain activities but indicated in records they had carried them out.

NRC Region 1 Administrator Hubert J. Miller, in a letter to PP&L, wrote that these numerous examples of both licensed and non-licensed personnel not performing required activities, yet documenting on records that the activities were carried out, raise serious questions regarding the adequacy of management and supervisory oversight at the station to ensure that management expectations were clearly communicated, understood and followed.

Mr. Miller further wrote that, "Even though no actual safety consequences resulted, management's failure to effectively communicate the expectation that activities be performed in accordance with procedures and with attention to detail had the potential for significant safety consequences."

Given the number of individuals involved, the actual and potential impact on equipment, the duration of the problem and the lack of management and supervisory oversight that resulted in the failure to detect this widespread condition, the NRC is classifying these alleged violations in the aggregate as a Severity Level II problem, which constitutes a very significant regulatory concern.

In assessing a proposed fine of \$160,000 for these alleged violations, the NRC credited PP&L for identifying most of the problems and for prompt and comprehensive corrective actions. However, the NRC determined that a significant fine was warranted, notwithstanding those PP&L actions to "emphasize the importance of performing activities as required, maintaining accurate records of such activities and providing appropriate control and oversight of such activities."

"This case represents particularly poor licensee performance, as evidenced by 1.) the nature of the violations associated with the Severity Level II problem, including the inoperability of the diesel generator for almost three weeks and the number of employees involved; 2.) the extensiveness of the problem with inaccurate records; and 3.) the management and supervisory failures demonstrated by these violations. Additionally, the NRC previously issued Information Notice 92-30 on April 23, 1992, and Generic Letter 93-03 on October 20, 1993, that described similar occurrences at other facilities. Your actions in response to these communications did not assure that plant personnel were properly performing their assigned duties at Susquehanna. It is not acceptable that these types of failures occurred in 1996."

Regarding the improper valve deactivation alleged violation, on July 30, 1996, a containment isolation valve was opened and deactivated for 24 hours, rendering the valve inoperable. The valve had been deactivated for preventive maintenance work but without the proper actions taken to comply with the plant's technical specification requirements.

The problem was significant because PP&L's incorrect interpretation of requirements would have allowed the valve to remain inoperable and open indefinitely.

A fine of \$50,000 has been proposed for that alleged violation.

The alleged violation which was cited but for which no fine has been proposed involved a non-licensed operator's failure to follow administrative procedures for controlling the status of equipment associated with the Standby Liquid Control System. The system's purpose is to shutdown the reactor during an emergency by injecting a neutron-absorbing solution into it via the core spray system. On June 12, 1996, the operator repositioned a breaker switch, resulting in the de-energization of heat tracing for an operable standby liquid control pump for 34 hours.

PP&L has 30 days to respond to the NRC's notice of violation. During that time, it may pay the fine or request in writing that all or part be withdrawn.

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