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NRC SENDS INSPECTION TEAM TO OCONEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Augmented Inspection Team To Assess May 3 Problems During Unit 3 Shutdown

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has dispatched a team of inspectors to Duke Power Company's Oconee nuclear power plant near Seneca, South Carolina to inspect and assess difficulties experienced on Saturday, May 3, while the Unit 3 reactor was being cooled following a planned shutdown.

An Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) arrived at the plant late Monday, May 5, to determine facts associated with problems experienced May 3 when two of three Unit 3 reactor coolant system High Pressure Injection pumps experienced low water flow problems, causing them to cavitate (pump air instead of water) and be taken out of operation while the reactor was being cooled following a planned shutdown on May 2.

The reactor remained in a stable condition. No emergency developed, but plant operators declared an Unusual Event while making a determination as to the cause of the pump problems and whether the third pump could be started to complete cooling the unit down. Officials determined that low water flow was due to level instrumentation problems which resulted in the draining of a storage tank which normally supplies water to the pumps. The problem was corrected, the tank filled, and at 11:20 a.m. on May 4, operators started the third pump which functioned normally and brought the reactor to cold shutdown by 2:00 p.m.

NRC resident inspectors monitored developments at the site, and maintained continuous contact with agency officials in Atlanta and Washington, D. C. throughout the event. State and local officials were provided precautionary notifications and kept informed of site developments.

The AIT will review company actions associated with the event's initiation and recovery and document its findings in a special report. The team is expected to complete its inspections late this week and discuss its preliminary findings

in a meeting with company officials which will be open to public observation.

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