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RELEASE

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**NRC STAFF ISSUES ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AT ST. LUCIE**

Overall Performance Good But Declines In Two Areas

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued a Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) report for the St. Lucie nuclear power plant, operated by Florida Power & Light Company near Ft. Pierce, which evaluates overall performance as good but shows decline in two of four functional areas assessed.

In a report issued May 5, the NRC said four functional areas of performance at St. Lucie were assessed during a period from January 7, 1996 through March 29, 1997 as being in one of three categories. The NRC considers Category 1 as superior, Category 2 as good and Category 3 as acceptable.

The report says St. Lucie performance in the functional areas of Operations and Maintenance remained in Category 2 (good), as in the plant's last assessment, but declined from Category 1 (superior) to Category 2 in the functional areas of Engineering and Plant Support.

The NRC attributed the decline from superior to good in Engineering to weaknesses in plant modification preparations, computer software quality verification and validation, and in identification and correction of some long-standing design control deficiencies. In the area of Plant Support, the NRC said radiation protection program implementation was good, but there was a significant decline in the plant's radiological emergency preparedness program early in the assessment period. The agency said the plant security program was generally effective, but some problems were observed with access control.

NRC officials said plant management actions taken to address weaknesses were considered reasonable and called for continued management attention to sustain lasting improvements.

NRC officials will discuss details of the report in a meeting with company officials at the St. Lucie plant at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, May 19. The meeting will be open to observation by the public, and NRC officials will be available at its conclusion to answer questions from interested observers.

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