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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC STAFF RATES SUSQUEHANNA "GOOD" IN THREE AREAS,
SUPERIOR IN FOURTH AREA OF LATEST ASSESSMENT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has rated the Susquehanna nuclear power plant as "good" in operations, maintenance and engineering, and "superior" in plant support in the latest Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) of the facility. The plant is located in Berwick, Pa., and is operated by PP&L, Inc.

The assessment covers the period from August 6, 1995, through August 16 of this year.

NRC staff and PP&L, Inc. officials will discuss the evaluation during a meeting scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on October 9, at the Susquehanna Energy Information Center. The meeting is open to the public for observation.

Four functional areas of nuclear power plant performance are rated in NRC SALP reports: plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. Ratings of Category 1 ("superior"), Category 2 ("good"), and Category 3 ("acceptable") are assigned.

In Susquehanna's previous SALP (which assessed the facility from February 27, 1994, through August 5, 1995), it was rated "superior" in all four areas.

"Operations management demonstrated a conservative approach to operation of the plant," wrote Hubert J. Miller, NRC Region I administrator, in a letter to PP&L. "In general, operations management responded aggressively to events to ensure operability and reliability of systems. However, some significant failures of licensed and non-licensed nuclear plant operators, to perform and document required equipment checks and inspections raised fundamental questions about the adequacy of supervisory oversight and communication of management expectations. In addition, configuration control weaknesses resulted in the misalignment of three safety related systems."

Concerning maintenance, Mr. Miller said: "Management oversight and involvement in response to high profile maintenance activities resulted in good corrective actions. Safety system reliability and plant material condition continued to be strengths at Susquehanna. The surveillance program was effectively implemented. However, human performance errors of consequence increased during this assessment period that resulted in equipment challenges including two reactor scrams and a reactor recirculation system runback.

"Corrective actions for minor human performance errors identified during the previous SALP were not effective in precluding these more significant events. Licensee self assessments provided insights into maintenance problems. However, the effectiveness of the licensee's corrective actions to address human performance weaknesses is not yet evident."

Regarding engineering, Mr. Miller said: "Engineering organizations generally made conservative decisions and modifications were properly installed and supported by sound analyses. However, the quality of safety evaluations and operability evaluations remain a weakness that has continued from the last SALP period. In addition, several longstanding design and licensing basis issues were either not identified and/or properly corrected."

In the area of plant support, Mr. Miller said: "Overall, the performance in radiological controls was excellent as evidenced by extensive planning and effective implementation of radiological controls for outage work. The environmental monitoring and effluent control programs continued to demonstrate excellent performance. The security, emergency preparedness, and fire protection programs continue to be effective."

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SALP reports are available on the NRC's internet web site (<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>) and by e-mail subscription. To receive SALP reports by e-mail as they are issued, send an e-mail to listproc@nrc.gov with the following message: subscribe salp yourfirstname yourlastname.