

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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~~IN~~DEPENDENT REVIEW OF MILLSTONE FIRINGS ORDERED

Chairman Shirley Ann Jackson of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission today named an administrative law judge, Acting Chief Judge Paul Bollwerk of the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel, to head an independent review of the dismissal by Northeast Utilities in 1996 of employees of the Millstone nuclear power plants in Waterford, Conn.

After looking into complaints, the NRC's Office of Inspector General raised a number of questions about how the NRC handled concerns that two or more of those workers may have been let go because they raised safety concerns. The IG report concluded that the NRC staff at first found that such discrimination probably had occurred, but then reversed itself.

In early January, Chairman Jackson directed the staff to conduct an internal review to address several of the issues raised in the Inspector General's report. That response is being released today.

By instituting an independent review, the Commission will be provided a second perspective on the dismissals, on how the matter was investigated, and on the decision not to take enforcement action against Northeast Utilities and one of its senior executives.

Judge Bollwerk reports administratively to the Chairman of the NRC, but like the Inspector General, he is entirely independent of the rest of the NRC staff. He is to be assisted in his review—due to be completed by March 12—by experts drawn both from inside and outside the NRC. None will have had prior involvement in the Millstone cases under scrutiny, nor do they report to NRC managers previously involved in reviewing the cases.

The independent inquiry is to assess the merits of the cases addressed in the Inspector General's report, along with a separate, but similar case at Millstone. It is also to formulate lessons learned from the NRC staff's handling of the cases and offer recommendations for improving investigative and enforcement procedures.

After studying the conclusions and recommendations both of the Bollwerk review and of the NRC staff's internal report, the Commission will then determine how broad-based a set of adjustments may be warranted in the agency's investigation and enforcement functions. If that course is pursued, the Commission will decide whether to seek the views of outside experts and other federal agencies in that effort.

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EDITORS: The text of the NRC staff's response to the Inspector General's report has been posted on the agency's Internet web page at:
<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports/ms.htm>.