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NRC CONFERENCE SCHEDULED WITH TVA ON RADIATION EXPOSURE AT WATTS BAR

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has scheduled a predecisional enforcement conference with officials of the Tennessee Valley Authority in Atlanta on January 13 to discuss apparent violations of NRC procedural requirements at the Watts Bar nuclear power plant which resulted in an unplanned radiation exposure to the fingers of a worker during refueling operations last September 20.

The meeting will be held at 1:00 p.m. (EST) in the main conference room on the 29th floor of the NRC Region II office, located in the Atlanta Federal Center at 61 Forsyth Street. The conference is open to observation by the public and the press.

The NRC said the worker noted four small, foreign objects resembling kitchen garbage bag ties lying on the reactor vessel flange on September 20 while working in the area while the unit was defueled. The worker placed the material in a plastic bag without having an appropriate radiation survey conducted and removed the bag from the reactor cavity area.

NRC officials said calculations indicated that the worker's thumb and forefinger were exposed to 3.645 rem, which is about seven percent of the 50-rem regulatory limit for exposure of an extremity for workers in commercial nuclear power plants. The individual is not expected to experience adverse health effects from the event.

The NRC staff is concerned that, although the worker's hand was not overexposed, multiple instances of failure to follow procedures created a potential for a more serious event. The NRC will discuss with TVA apparent violations involving (1) failure to prepare and provide an adequate radiation work permit and pre-job briefing; (2) failure to conduct an adequate shift turnover, resulting in failure to use the latest radiological dose rates, radiological contamination levels, and airborne radioactivity levels from surveys of the work area and (3) failure to follow procedural requirements which cautioned workers that all debris was to be treated as highly radioactive until determined otherwise.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that a determination has been made that a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. The purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes, and safety significance, to provide the licensee with an opportunity to point out errors that may have been made in NRC inspection reports; and to enable the company to outline its proposed

corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violation or any contemplated enforcement action, such as a civil penalty, will be made at the conference. Those decisions will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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