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NRC ORDER TO THE VIRGINIA POWER CONFIRMS FIRE BARRIER CORRECTIVE ACTIONS AT SURRY UNITS 1 AND 2

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a confirmatory order to Virginia Electric and Power Company confirming its commitment to complete Thermo-Lag fire barrier corrective actions at its Surry nuclear power plant Units 1 and 2. The work is to be completed by the end of refueling outages scheduled for October at Unit 1, and for April 1999 at Unit 2.

In a letter to Virginia Power officials, Sam Collins, Director of the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, said the order was issued because of concern "that some licensees may not be making adequate progress toward resolving the plant-specific issues, and that some implementation schedules may either be too tenuous or too protracted." The Surry plants, located near Newport News, Va., are among them.

Thermo-Lag is a fire barrier material manufactured and supplied by Thermal Science, Inc., of St. Louis, Missouri, and has been used to provide fire resistance to wiring and equipment at nuclear plants. The NRC has been concerned that Thermo-Lag 330-1 fire barrier material installed by some of its licensees may not provide the intended level of fire protection and that licensees thus may not be meeting regulatory requirements. Between 1992 and 1994, the NRC staff issued letters to all nuclear utilities asking licensees to submit plans and schedules for resolving the issue. All licensees with Thermo-Lag fire barriers have implemented around-the-clock "fire watches," using workers to patrol vital plant areas on a regular basis to watch for signs of fire until corrective actions have been completed.

In his letter Collins noted that NRC has been meeting with licensees to review their progress in completing implementation of their fire barrier programs, but has been concerned about slow progress on resolution of the issue at certain plants.

Virginia Power was one of the licensees with which NRC has periodically held meetings. At these meetings, the NRC reviewed the utility's schedule for Thermo-Lag corrective actions and concluded they are reasonable. The company formally agreed May 22 to the terms of the confirmatory order. Thermo-Lag corrective actions are now

about 80 percent complete at Surry.

About 20 other plants have received, or are expected to receive, similar orders in the coming months.

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Additional information on Thermo-Lag fire barriers can be found on the NRC homepage at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/gmo/tip/tip9826.htm>