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COOPER NUCLEAR STATION RATED 'SUPERIOR' IN ONE AREA, 'GOOD' IN TWO,  
'ACCEPTABLE' IN THE FOURTH IN NRC ASSESSMENT REPORT

Cooper Nuclear Station, a nuclear power plant near Brownville, Nebraska, received performance ratings of "superior" in plant support, "good" in plant operations and maintenance, and "acceptable" in engineering in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest systematic assessment of licensee performance (SALP) for the facility.

The SALP report was sent August 17 to the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), which operates the plant. The report evaluates the plant's performance from January 12, 1997, through July 11 of this year.

NRC and NPPD officials will discuss the report during a meeting set for 2 p.m. Thursday, September 3, at Cooper Nuclear Station. The meeting will be open for public observation. NRC officials will be available afterwards to speak with reporters, state and local officials, and members of the public.

NRC systematic assessment reports rate licensees in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support -- and assign ratings of Category 1, 2, or 3 depending on whether their performance in those areas was superior, good or acceptable. Cooper was given the following scores on the current SALP and the previous SALP in January, 1997:

<u>Functional areas &amp; ratings</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>Previous</u>
Plant Operations	2	2
Maintenance	2	2
Engineering	3	3
Plant Support	1	2

In his cover letter to the report, NRC Regional Administrator Ellis W. Merschoff said, "Overall, safety performance at the Cooper Nuclear Station continued to improve. There are, however, still areas of concern, especially in engineering."

"Performance in the operations area improved noticeably over the assessment period," Mr. Merschoff said. Both management and staff demonstrated a conservative operating philosophy and established performance expectations that produced positive results throughout the site.

In the maintenance area, craft personnel continued their strong performance and the establishment of improved work control processes was especially notable. A number of hardware problems indicated some weakness in performance monitoring and maintenance implementation.

"While performing acceptably overall, the engineering functional area continued to demonstrate substantive weaknesses," Mr. Merschoff said. Engineering did not provide consistently timely, effective and comprehensive support to operations and maintenance activities. Weaknesses in maintaining the design and licensing basis of the plant challenged engineering's ability to effectively support the operation and maintenance of plant systems and components. Late in the SALP period Cooper initiated a strategy for achieving engineering excellence. Implementation of this strategy will be a focal point of future NRC inspection.

Performance in Plant Support areas improved to a superior level. This was characterized by an excellent physical security program, effective implementation of the "As Low as Reasonably Achievable" program for personnel exposure, and good performance in emergency preparedness. Housekeeping and fire protection were noted to have improved during the period.

"Corrective action effectiveness was noted as a continuing problem throughout the Cooper Organization," Mr. Merschoff said. An improvement plan was implemented during the SALP period and resulted in some progress; however, the full benefits have yet to be realized.

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EDITORS/NEWS DIRECTORS: A copy of the full SALP report is available from this office. It is also available in electronic format on the NRC Office of Public Affairs Internet home page at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>.