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NRC ISSUES PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR SALEM NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff, in its latest review of performance at the Salem nuclear power plant, has found that safety performance at the facility remains acceptable. The twin-reactor plant, located in Hancocks Bridge, N.J., is operated by Public Service Electric & Gas (PSE&G) Co.

In a letter to the company outlining the results of a review covering the period of April 1998 through January 1999, A. Randolph Blough, director of the NRC Region I Division of Reactor Projects, wrote that while "PSE&G faced significant challenges in recovering both units from extended shutdowns, operational results were positive and management established high standards of performance."

The material condition of the plant was good, he said, and management provided strong oversight of activities. Also, problems were promptly identified and corrected, with the program used to identify and fix problems continuing to be effective. In the area of human performance, a number of errors and inconsistencies surfaced that required attention.

Blough said the plant was operated well. Maintenance activities continued to be performed acceptably. Engineering benefitted from strong oversight, with notable improvements in the implementation of programs. Performance in the plant support area continued to be good.

Based on this performance, the NRC staff will conduct normal inspections during the next evaluation period, with a supplemental inspection planned in the engineering area to review progress on the fire wrap issue.

Beginning in June, Salem will be a voluntary pilot plant for the NRC's new assessment process. The associated program is still under development.

The text of the plant performance review (PPR) letter is available from the NRC Region I Office of Public Affairs and on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/ppr>.

NRC reviews safety performance twice a year at every licensed nuclear power plant in the nation. These reviews give the agency staff an integrated assessment of plant performance and provide a basis for planning inspection activities.

PPRs are being used by the NRC as an interim measure to monitor nuclear power plant safety. The agency began using PPRs for this purpose after suspending the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) process until a new assessment program is developed. Previously, SALP reports were issued every 12 to 24 months.

The new reactor oversight and assessment program being developed will provide quarterly performance reports, based on a number of performance indicators and on inspection findings. This program will be tested at eight sites beginning in June and will be extended to all plants next January. A full description of the new program is available on the NRC web site at:
<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm>.

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