

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC STAFF AUTHORIZES NORTHEAST UTILITIES TO BEGIN
RESTART OF MILLSTONE UNIT 3

L. Joseph Callan, Executive Director for Operations of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, has given his approval for Northeast Nuclear Energy Company to begin restart activities at the Millstone Unit 3 nuclear power plant at Waterford, Connecticut.

Mr. Callan acted to approve commencement of restart activities after the NRC staff verified that the utility had resolved several final technical and programmatic issues that remained before the unit could resume operations. Over the past several weeks, there have been a number of issues, including one which was recently identified, that the NRC staff has been closely following. The NRC staff carefully monitored the licensee's actions and also conducted its own independent assessment. Though there may be some issues that could result in NRC enforcement actions, the staff did not identify any safety problems or programmatic issues that would preclude restart approval. Northeast Energy formally notified the NRC today that Unit 3 was ready to commence restart activities.

Once restart begins, the NRC will monitor closely the restart and power ascension of Unit 3, including round-the-clock control room coverage by inspectors during key phases of the process. Northeast Energy's plan for restart and power ascension operations is designed to proceed in a gradual, deliberate manner. This plan calls for Northeast to discuss with the NRC its successive evaluations at "hold points" of approximately 30, 50, 75 and 90 percent power. The NRC has acknowledged Northeast's written commitment to discuss the results of its assessments at each hold point. The NRC will independently assess the plant's readiness, and Northeast Energy must adequately act on any NRC concerns before the facility can proceed to the next level. The NRC will also review the

company's 100-percent power level assessment before concurring that the restart and power ascension process has been successfully completed. The NRC staff plans to discuss with the utility the overall assessment results in a public meeting to be held near the plant.

The Commission voted on June 15 to transfer restart authorization for Millstone Unit 3 to Mr. Callan, the NRC's chief staff executive, after two earlier public briefings on corrective measures Northeast Energy has taken since the unit was shut down in March 1996. That action moved it from "Category 3" to "Category 2" on the NRC Watch List of plants under special scrutiny. Two companion facilities, Millstone Units 1 and 2, which are also shut down, remain "Category 3" plants, requiring votes by the Commission before they may restart.

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