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I-99-30

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April 12, 1999

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRC

ES PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff, in its latest review of performance at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, has found that safety performance at the facility remains acceptable. Vermont Yankee, located in Brattleboro, Vt., is operated by the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp.

In a letter to the company outlining the results of the review, Richard Crlenjak, deputy director of the NRC Region I Division of Reactor Projects, said equipment performance and overall plant material condition "resulted in a high state of readiness of standby safety systems" during the evaluation period of April 1998 through Jan. 15, 1999. While the NRC found plant operator performance to be "typically good," human performance errors led to some plant configuration problems. However, plant management has taken several steps to improve human performance, he said. In addition, he noted that the prioritization of engineering issues and refueling outage preparation remain challenges for Vermont Yankee.

Crlenjak said most maintenance and testing activities were performed well. However, a number of equipment problems provided evidence of weaknesses regarding the control and oversight of outage-related contractor work. Good performance was observed in engineering, but some problems were noted in the control of vendor services. The plant's radiation protection program was effectively implemented, with the exception of problems involving initial work planning, control and coordination of torus modification activities; other plant support work was performed well.

Based on the performance, the NRC staff will conduct normal inspections during the next evaluation period, with supplemental inspections in the following areas: maintenance -- a follow-up assessment of prior NRC findings and a review of pre-outage planning; engineering -- an assessment of engineering support to operations and pre-outage engineering preparations; and plant support -- an assessment of radiation outage protection preparation, based on problems identified during the last refueling outage.

The text of the plant performance review 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.

Plant performance reviews are being used by the NRC as an interim measure to monitor nuclear power plant safety. The agency began using it 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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