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**NRC PROPOSES \$55,000 FINE AGAINST NORTHEAST UTILITIES
FOR VIOLATION INVOLVING SAFETY SYSTEM PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$55,000 fine against Northeast Utilities for failing to adequately address a problem involving a safety system at the Millstone nuclear power plant's Unit 3. NU owns and operates Millstone, located in Waterford, Conn.

All three of the reactors at Millstone will have been shut down for two years as of March 30. NU is working to correct problems at the units, with its most immediate goal the restart of Unit 3.

During an inspection conducted last year, NRC inspectors determined that despite prior opportunities to do so, NU failed to identify the potential for air to be drawn into certain pumps that would be needed following a loss-of-coolant accident. That could have resulted in damage to the pumps and hindered or removed their ability to help keep the plant's nuclear fuel covered with water and cooled.

NRC staff and representatives of NU discussed the violation during a predecisional enforcement conference on January 13.

William D. Travers, Director of the NRC's Special Projects Office for Millstone, pointed out in a letter to NU regarding the enforcement action that the company assured the agency the actual safety significance of the violation was low, "noting your determination that the pumps would have performed satisfactorily. This determination was based on your recent assessment which indicated that the total volume of air was small; the predicted void fractions (air pockets) were also small and would occur over a short duration; and the air entrainment would be well below void fraction acceptance criteria."

In order for the utility to reach this conclusion, it performed a detailed evaluation, including the use of a one-quarter scale model.

Based on an assessment of the utility's analysis and testing, the NRC staff has determined that while the issue would not adversely impact the system's ability to function, it does involve a nonconformance with Unit 3's licensing basis.

"This violation is of regulatory concern," Mr. Travers stated, "because, as you acknowledged at the conference, you missed prior opportunities, both in the past as well as more recently, to identify this condition."

In addition, the plant's Configuration Management Plan, which was specifically designed to identify such issues, did not do so in this case, he said.

Despite the violation, Travers said that in light of NU's effective corrective actions in response to the finding, the NRC staff has decided not to expand the scope of an ongoing review of Unit 3's conformance with its licensing and design bases.

"This determination is consistent with the process being used by the NRC staff as described in my letter to you dated January 30, 1998. Our ongoing reviews of Unit 3 licensing and design bases conformance will include continued assessments to determine if any expansion in the scope of our reviews is warranted," the director wrote.

NU has 30 days to pay the fine or request in writing that all or part be withdrawn.

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