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NRC FINDS PERFORMANCE 'ACCEPTABLE' AT COOPER NUCLEAR STATION IN LATEST REVIEW

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has found that safety performance remains acceptable in the NRC's latest plant performance review at Cooper Nuclear Station, located near Brownville, Nebraska.

Officials of NRC and Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), the utility which operates the plant, will discuss the review during a meeting set for Tuesday, March 30, in the Administration Building at Cooper. 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.

In a letter to NPPD Senior Vice President G. R. Horn summarizing the review findings, NRC Director of the Division of Reactor Projects Kenneth E. Brockman said, "Overall, the performance of the Cooper staff during the assessment period was acceptable. No significant events occurred, conservative decision making was noted, and licensed operators routinely demonstrated professionalism in the main control room. . . . Problems with communications in the control room resulted in several minor events and, at times, licensed operators failed to identify or understand equipment operability requirements. Occurrences of inadequate and improperly implemented procedures continued to result in equipment unavailability.

"Cooper engineering continued to experience significant problems in maintaining the design basis. Plant staff effectively implemented programs for physical security, access authorization, radiation protection, and emergency preparedness. Although the threshold for documenting problems was low, the corrective action program was not always formally implemented, thereby resulting in failures to identify and correct the cause of plant problems in all functional areas," Mr. Brockman said. The core inspection program in Engineering will be supplemented by several regional initiative efforts during the next eight months. Other areas will receive only core inspection.

The text of the plant performance review letter is available from the NRC Region IV 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 an interim measure NRC is utilizing to monitor nuclear power plant safety. The agency began using it for this purpose after suspending the Systematic Assessment of License 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 plants beginning in June and, if found acceptable, 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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