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NRC TO REVIEW Y2K PROGRAMS AT ALL 103 OPERATING NUCLEAR PLANTS AND CONDUCT SPECIAL CONTINGENCY PLAN AUDITS AT SIX PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will review Year 2000 computer program activities at all 103 operating nuclear power plants beginning April 1 to verify the status of licensee efforts to ensure the plants will be able to function safely on January 1, 2000, and beyond. In addition, the NRC will conduct special audits of Y2K contingency plans at six of those plants.

The reviews will allow NRC to check on the progress of all licensees and determine whether any regulatory action is needed. Information from the reviews also will be used in conjunction with status reports NRC has directed its power reactor licensees to provide by July 1.

The reviews will be conducted between April 1 and July 31 by NRC inspectors.   The reviews will (1) verify that all NRC licensees have implemented Y2K program activities; (2) evaluate the progress they have made to assure they are on schedule to achieve Y2K readiness; and (3) assess their contingency plans for addressing Y2K-related problems.

Last fall, the NRC began audits at 12 nuclear power plants to evaluate the effectiveness of measures licensees are taking to identify and correct Y2K problems. Those audits, completed in January, did not reveal any problems suggesting NRC- licensed plants will be unable to achieve Y2K readiness.

No Y2K problems have been found that directly affect the proper functioning of safety systems in nuclear power plants. Those items requiring fixes at nuclear plants have typically been found in systems that support day-to-day plant operation -- such as data logs and personnel access controls -- but which are not necessary for the safe operation and shutdown of the plant.

Inspectors conducting the Y2K reviews will receive special training. Their inspection procedures and Y2K review checklist will be posted on the NRC Internet web page at: http://www.nrc/gov/NRC/NEWS/year2000html.   The NRC also plans to post results of the reviews after they are complete.   This site has additional information relating to steps NRC is taking to deal with the Year 2000 problem.

The special contingency plan audits will be done at six sites: (1) Palo Verde in Arizona; (2) Oconee in South Carolina; (3) Duane Arnold in Iowa; (4) Indian Point 2 in New York; (5) Turkey Point in Florida; and (6) Diablo Canyon in California. These plants were selected on the basis of grid system, location, design and age.   The plants chosen for the contingency audits

are different than the 12 plants previously audited to expand the group of licensees sampled. The audits at these facilities will examine in more detail backup measures the utilities have in place to deal with possible Y2K problems, either onsite or offsite, that might affect plant operations.

The "Year 2000" or Y2K problem refers to computers' potential inability to recognize 20th Century dates beginning with January 1, 2000. It is caused by computer programs that use two-digit numbers to represent a calendar year (such as "98" for 1998). If the problem is not corrected, vulnerable computer systems will read "00" as 1900, rather than 2000, possibly causing some systems or equipment to malfunction. The nuclear utility industry is engaged in Y2K readiness programs at all nuclear facilities to seek out and correct Y2K problems that have any potential to affect facility operations.

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