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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC ISSUES PERFORMANCE REVIEW FOR MILLSTONE NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff, in its latest review of performance at the Millstone nuclear power plant, has found the safety performance for Unit 3 to be acceptable. Millstone, located in Waterford, Conn., is operated by Northeast Utilities.

Covered in the review was the period from April 1998 through Jan. 15, 1999. Unit 3 resumed power production last July, following a shutdown of more than two years. The Commission must still approve the restart of Unit 2, the other operational reactor at the site; it has been out of service since early 1996. A Commission briefing on the subject is scheduled for Wednesday, April 14. Unit 1 has been permanently shut down.

In a letter to the company outlining the results of the review, Wayne Lanning, Director of the Millstone Inspection Directorate in the NRC Region I office, wrote that Unit 3's operators have "characteristically made safe, conservative decisions regarding plant operations and have worked to raise the standards for operations." The unit experienced a number of plant trips and shutdowns shortly after startup as a result of equipment and procedural problems, challenging operators. But when events and equipment problems have surfaced, Unit 3's operators have responded well, taking appropriate safety actions in each case.

Maintenance and testing activities, including troubleshooting and repair work, continued to be generally well controlled, particularly in the area of procedural controls. Engineering was acceptable. The plant continues to be faced with a large workload associated with restart of Unit 2, preparations for an upcoming Unit 3 refueling outage and emergent work. Management has prioritized work as needed to support the safe operation of Unit 3. The performance of plant support organizations continued to be good.

Based on this performance, the NRC staff will conduct normal inspections during the next evaluation period, with supplemental inspections planned for the following areas: operations -- an assessment of operational performance during the startup of Unit 2 and the shutdown for Unit 3 refueling outage, scheduled for May; maintenance -- an assessment of the effectiveness of the new work control process in reducing the corrective action backlog; and plant support -- an assessment of the air sampling and bioassay program and of the Unit 1 radioactive waste processing and liquid radioactive waste storage tank barriers to prevent releases.

The text of the plant performance review (PPR) 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.

PPRs 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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