

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
Region III Office of Public Affairs
801 Warrenville Road, Lisle, IL 60532-4351

NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: RIII-98-48 August 28, 1998
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NRC STAFF RATES MONTICELLO PLANT "SUPERIOR" IN THREE AREAS,
"GOOD" IN FOURTH AREA FOR LATEST PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has rated the Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant "superior" in engineering, maintenance, and plant support and "good" in plant operations in the latest NRC evaluation of plant performance.

The plant, operated by Northern States Power Company, is at Monticello, Minnesota.

The review, called the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP), covers the period from July 1996 through July of this year.

The SALP report will be discussed in a meeting between the NRC staff and utility officials at 2 p.m. on September 9. The meeting will be in the Training Center at the Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant in Monticello.

The meeting is open to public observation. Members of the NRC staff will be available after the meeting for comments and questions from the public and news media.

NRC SALP reports evaluate utilities in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support -- and assign ratings of Category 1, 2, or 3 depending on whether their performance in those areas is superior, good or acceptable. The report on Monticello gives the plant a "Category 1" rating -- indicating superior performance -- in maintenance, engineering, and plant support and a "Category 2" rating -- indicating good performance -- in plant operations.

Compared to the previous assessment period, Monticello improved from a "good" rating to "superior" in engineering and declined from "superior" to "good" in operations. Maintenance and Plant Support were rated "superior" in both assessment periods.

"Overall, performance at the Monticello station was excellent," said James Caldwell, acting NRC Regional Administrator. "Strong management involvement was evident throughout the assessment period. The material condition of the plant was excellent which resulted in high availability and reliability of plant equipment."

He indicated that the conduct of infrequently performed plant operations, like startups and shutdowns, was excellent. "However, the conduct of routine operations did not reflect the same level of discipline and vigilance observed during non-routine evolutions," he added.

"Effective work planning and control, excellent interdepartmental teamwork and communications, experienced and qualified craft personnel, strong system engineering support, and active management oversight contributed to the excellent material condition of plant equipment," Caldwell said.

In the engineering area, he noted that comprehensive corrective actions had been taken to address design engineering weaknesses identified during the period assessment period.

Caldwell continued, "The conduct of Plant Support activities was excellent as a result of strong and well implemented programs in radiation protection, security, chemistry, and emergency preparedness."

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