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I-97-143

November 6, 1997

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NRC RATES PILGRIM AS "GOOD" IN LATEST ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE;
ENGINEERING AREA FOUND TO HAVE DECLINED FROM PREVIOUS PERIOD

The Pilgrim nuclear power plant has received ratings of "good" in all four performance areas evaluated in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff's latest periodic assessment of the facility. Located in Plymouth, Mass., the plant is owned and operated by Boston Edison Company.

The NRC issues Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance, or SALP, reports for the nation's commercial nuclear power plants about once every 18 months. The latest SALP for Pilgrim covers the period from April 7, 1996, through September 13.

A decline in the area of engineering, from "superior" to "good," was the only change from the plant's previous SALP.

NRC staff and Boston Edison officials will discuss the report during a meeting scheduled for 1 p.m. on Thursday, November 13, at the Pilgrim site. The meeting will be open to the public for observation. Afterwards, NRC staff will be available to speak with reporters, state and local officials, and members of the public.

Four functional areas of nuclear power plant performance are rated in SALP reports: plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. Ratings of Category 1 ("superior"), 2 ("good") or 3 ("acceptable") are assigned.

In a letter to Boston Edison accompanying the report, NRC Region 1 Administrator Hubert J. Miller wrote that while the plant's performance was generally good, "continued management attention is needed to address issues in several areas."

"The facility operated well with few operational transients," Mr Miller said. "The material condition of the

plant improved and safety-related equipment reliability continued to be very good. Human performance varied with some areas showing improvement from the previous SALP period. Performance during the last refueling outage that ended in April 1997 improved over the previous outage with respect to overall control of work activities. Improvement in the problem-reporting process generally resulted in the identification of problems at a lower threshold."

The regional administrator noted, however, that the NRC has observed weaknesses in the plant's corrective action program, citing persistent problems in the use of procedures and in the resolution of several potentially significant design issues.

NRC staff found that in the area of operations, there were improvements in the control of operational activities and in the performance of newly licensed reactor operator candidates. Still, the agency determined there was a continued failure to identify degraded equipment and process issues.

The area of maintenance saw improvements in work control and in increased management presence in the field. In addition, NRC staff noted that the plant's material condition was generally improved and the reliability of safety-related equipment was very good.

Regarding engineering, the NRC staff pointed out that although management oversight and involvement in routine activities and emergent plant problems remained generally good, problems were found in the interfaces among the plant departments involved in replacement/modification work on the emergency core cooling system strainer.

"Further, significant problems were noted in maintenance of the licensing and design bases for the plant," Mr. Miller wrote. "Those problems reflected some important weaknesses in your self-assessment and corrective action processes."

Finally, in the area of plant support, the NRC staff reported that radiation exposures at Pilgrim continue to be high despite efforts to address the problem. Also, performance by emergency preparedness, security and fire protection personnel continued to be good. Housekeeping was good, but access to some areas in the reactor building was affected by radiological conditions.

The full SALP report may be viewed on the NRC's Internet web site at <<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>>. The reports for all plants also may be obtained by e-mail, as they are issued. Send an e-mail to listproc@nrc.gov with no subject and the following message: subscribe SALP yourfirstname yourlastname.

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