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I-96-84
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December 26, 1996
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOPE CREEK NUCLEAR POWER PLANT RECEIVES "GOOD" RATINGS
IN NRC'S LATEST SYSTEMATIC ASSESSMENT OF LICENSEE PERFORMANCE REPORT

In its latest periodic review of overall performance by the Hope Creek nuclear power plant, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has given the Hancocks Bridge, N.J., facility ratings of "good" in the four major areas considered. While the agency noted improvements in the categories of operations, maintenance and engineering since the last Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance, or SALP, it also found the area of plant support had declined, due principally to problems with security, radiation exposure controls and emergency preparedness implementation.

The SALP report was sent Tuesday to Public Service Electric & Gas (PSE&G) Company, which operates the plant. It evaluates the facility's performance from April 23, 1995, to November 9 of this year.

NRC staff will meet with PSE&G officials on January 7 to discuss the review. The session will take place at 2 p.m. at the Processing Center at the plant and will be open for public observation.

SALP reports for each operating commercial nuclear power plant in the United States are issued approximately once every 18 months by the NRC. Senior NRC managers meet and rate performance for four functional areas -- operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. A category 1 rating is given for a "superior" level of safety performance, a Category 2 for "good" performance and a Category 3 for "acceptable" performance.

In a letter to PSE&G, NRC Regional Administrator Hubert J. Miller said overall performance at Hope Creek improved during this SALP period following a "significant decline" during the previous one.

"Your actions to address the areas of concern, once identified, were comprehensive and generally effective," Mr. Miller wrote. "These actions included significant management changes in the organization, as well as a significant expansion of the scope of the refueling outage to repair or modify plant equipment that previously challenged operators. In addition, your operator intervention early in the period resulted in overall improvement in operator standards and ownership of the plant by the end of the period, but also created a lack of depth in on-shift operator staffing that remains a current challenge."

Self-assessments and quality assurance audits were observed to be thorough and produced important findings, Mr. Miller continued. Plant material condition improved over the period, though "you are still challenged by a large corrective and preventive maintenance backlog. In addition, a backlog of pending revisions to operations and maintenance procedures was indicative of procedural weaknesses that, on occasion, challenged plant staff and contributed to events," he said.

The plant's security access control program demonstrated deficiencies late in the assessment period, Mr. Miller said, raising concerns about

security guard performance, communications with operations, and the effectiveness of oversight of the program by both station management and independent oversight groups.

EDITORS: A copy of the full SALP report is available from this office. SALP reports are also available on the NRC's Internet web site (<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>) and by e-mail subscription. To receive SALP reports by e-mail as they are issued, send an e-mail to listproc@nrc.gov with the following message: subscribe salp yourfirstname yourlastname.

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