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NRC SENDS AUGMENTED INSPECTION TEAM  
TO ARKANSAS NUCLEAR FOLLOWING REACTOR TRIP

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has sent an augmented inspection team to the Arkansas Nuclear One, Unit 1, nuclear power plant near Russellville, Arkansas.

The five-man team of inspectors, who arrived at the plant today, will look into factors that caused an automatic shutdown of the reactor Sunday, May 19, and the complications that ensued.

The series of events to be examined are as follows:

Unit 1 shut itself down at 3:12 a.m. May 19 while operating at 100 percent power. The shutdown resulted when the operating speed of a main feedwater pump suddenly decreased, reducing the flow of feedwater. This pump supplies water to the plant's steam generators, which cool the reactor and generate steam to drive the electricity-producing main turbine. The reduced cooling water flow was detected and the plant shutdown, or tripped, as designed.

As expected, main steam safety valves designed to protect the system from high pressure opened and vented non-radioactive steam outside the plant. After relieving excess pressure the safety valves are designed to close. However, one safety valve serving one of the steam generators stuck open. To prevent excess cooling of the reactor coolant system, the affected steam generator was isolated and it subsequently boiled dry.

A Notice of Unusual Event, the NRC's lowest classification for emergency events, was declared by plant operators at 3:30 a.m. By 4:30 a.m. the temperature in the shut-down plant was stable at a normal temperature of 550 degrees F. About 9 a.m. the dry steam generator was refilled with water, and the Notice of Unusual Event was canceled at 1:04 p.m. No radiation was released from the plant, and the safety of plant personnel and the public was not threatened.

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The special NRC inspection team will focus on understanding the entire sequence of events and the cause of the initial failure of the main feed pump. It also will review the response of the main steam safety valves, including the cause of the failure of one of the valves to close as designed.

Other factors to be reviewed include the impact of recent plant modifications on equipment which affected plant response to the event, the analysis of stresses induced in the steam generator, and the ability of the steam generator to continue to operate safely.

The team is tentatively scheduled to complete its work on Friday, May 24, and a report documenting findings will be issued in about three weeks. NRC will hold a meeting with Entergy Operations, Inc., the licensee, to discuss preliminary inspection findings some time after May 24. The meeting will be open for public observation.

An NRC augmented inspection team is solely a fact-finding body and will not determine if violations of NRC regulations occurred. Violations, if any, will be determined by subsequent NRC inspections.

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