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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC REGION I ADMINISTRATOR APPROVES RESTART OF SALEM UNIT 2

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's administrator for the Northeastern United States has approved the restart of Salem nuclear power plant Unit 2, following a more than two-year shutdown of the Hancocks Bridge, N.J., facility.

NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller notified plant owner and operator Public Service Electric & Gas (PSE&G) Company of the decision in a letter sent today. Mr. Miller noted the NRC has conducted a multidisciplinary review involving numerous inspectors and found the unit to be ready for restart. This determination is based on significant enhancements in the unit's material condition, improvements in plant programs and processes, and the extensive corrective actions accomplished to date.

But the administrator also stressed that the agency will continue to monitor the unit as it returns to service, probably within the next several days. As part of that oversight, the NRC has established holdpoints for the plant power ascension program. Those holdpoints will occur at three power levels -- 25, 50 and 90 percent -- to allow an assessment of Unit 2 performance.

Salem Unit 2 has been out of service since June 7, 1995. Salem Unit 1 was shutdown on May 16, 1995 and is expected to remain off-line until some later date. The extended outage at both units was needed to address the causes of multiple programmatic problems, to repair degraded equipment and to improve corrective action processes at the 1,100-megawatt pressurized-water reactors.

After the units were shutdown by PSE&G, the NRC issued a Confirmatory Action Letter to the utility on June 9, 1995, spelling out the changes the company agreed to make to improve the plant and requiring that the reactors remain off-line until those commitments were met. In addition, the NRC established a group of managers from various headquarters and regional offices to coordinate the agency's inspection and assessment efforts and to focus on the progress of performance improvements at both

units.

Subsequently, PSE&G submitted an overall restart plan to the NRC on November 24, 1995. It was accepted by the agency on February 13, 1996. After soliciting input from the public and state officials, the NRC's assessment group independently developed the NRC Restart Action Plan, which was published on February 23, 1996.

Mr. Miller wrote to PSE&G that the NRC has performed many inspections at the plant since June 1995 to evaluate utility progress in resolving performance issues.

"These activities included augmented resident inspector staff inspections, specialist review of discrete areas by regional and headquarters staff, and multidisciplined team inspections," Mr. Miller stated. "Additionally, detailed inspections were conducted of the Integrated Test Program. These efforts also included inspection of 45 technical and 24 programmatic restart issues and the independent review of nine Salem restart plans per revision 4 of the Restart Action Plan. Two major design inspections were completed, including a Final Safety Analysis Report (FSAR) team inspection and a Safety System Functional Inspection (SSFI) in December 1996 and January 1997, respectively.

"Two public meetings were conducted, in March and May 1997, to solicit public input on Salem Unit 2 restart," he continued. And an NRC Readiness Assessment Team Inspection (RATI), which involved two weeks of on-site review by 14 inspectors, and a related public exit meeting were conducted in June 1997.

All told, the NRC expended approximately 17,000 hours on inspections and approximately 13,000 hours on reviewing licensing matters at the unit.

"Notwithstanding the numerous reviews ..., the NRC will continue to closely monitor activities at Salem. We intend to maintain the SAP (Salem Assessment Panel) in an active oversight role until sustained improved performance has been demonstrated for both Salem units. The SAP will continue to monitor performance and adjust NRC resources applied to Salem activities, as appropriate," Mr. Miller said.

Besides the power ascension holdpoints, the NRC plans to perform a final assessment after about two months of full power operations.

The NRC will consider the restart of Unit 1 separately.

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