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Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NRC TO HOLD PREDECISIONAL ENFORCEMENT CONFERENCE
WITH DETROIT EDISON COMPANY ON AN APPARENT VIOLATION AT FERMI

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet November 18 with representatives of Detroit Edison Company for a predecisional enforcement conference on an apparent violation at the Fermi Nuclear Power Plant. The facility is near Monroe, Michigan.

The meeting will start at 10:00 a.m. in the Third Floor Conference Room of the NRC Region III Office, 801 Warrenville Road, Lisle, Illinois. It is open to public observation. NRC officials will be available at its conclusion to answer questions from the news media and other interested observers.

The discussion will focus on Detroit Edison's apparent inadequate evaluation of the safety implications when it changed procedures affecting the emergency equipment cooling system. This system supplies cooling water to equipment that would be needed in certain accident conditions.

NRC's concerns relate to an analysis done by Detroit Edison in 1995, when it concluded that--because of the need for additional cooling water during hot weather conditions--this cooling water system could be used during normal plant operations to augment a non-safety related cooling water system. The utility made this change in the plant's formal design documents.

Last year, NRC staff discovered a potential accident scenario in which this cooling system would not provide enough cooling water to emergency shutdown equipment. Under this scenario, non-safety systems would continue to be cooled by this cooling system instead of being automatically disconnected, thus preventing the emergency equipment from being adequately cooled.

As a result, Detroit Edison developed procedures which required, among other things, that plant operators manually separate the non-safety systems during this accident scenario.

During an inspection in August through October, NRC questioned the utility's analysis. Inspectors noted that both the use of the cooling system during normal operations and the

procedure changes requiring operator action resulted in new safety questions that needed to be formally reviewed. In an apparent violation of NRC requirements, Detroit Edison apparently failed to identify these unreviewed safety questions during its own safety evaluation and subsequent procedural changes.

NRC requires that new safety questions arising from changes to a facility to be submitted to the NRC for evaluation and possible amendments to the plant's license.

The decision to hold an enforcement conference does not mean the NRC has determined that a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide the licensee an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the company to outline its proposed corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violations or any contemplated enforcement action, such as a fine, will be made at this conference. Those decisions will be made by senior NRC officials at a later date.

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