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FOR IMMEDIATE

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NRC PROPOSES TO FINE COOPER \$50,000

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) that it proposes to fine the company \$50,000 for a violation of NRC requirements at the Cooper Nuclear Station in Brownville, Neb.

NPPD has 30 days to respond to the citation. During that time it may pay the civil penalty or protest it. If a protest is denied, the company may ask for a hearing.

This enforcement action results from an inspection by the senior NRC resident inspector in November 1995 and a follow-on NRC inspection conducted in February that found that main steam tunnel blowout panels had been improperly modified. These panels are designed to relieve pressure in the steam tunnel in the event of a main steam line break and ensure that external forces on primary containment are limited to protect the integrity of primary containment.

The blowout panels were modified in June 1985 when fiberglass was applied to prevent secondary containment leakage. However, until identified by the NRC, no evaluation had been performed to determine whether this modification constituted an unreviewed safety question. Extensive analysis performed after the modification was found shows that steam tunnel pressure could have exceeded the licensed safety limit of 15 pounds per square inch during a postulated main steam line break, without damaging containment integrity.

In a letter to NPPD officials, L. Joe Callan, administrator for NRC Region IV, said, "Although Cooper's analysis indicated that the potential consequences of the conditions were minimal, the significance of this violation is based on the fact that NPPD operated Cooper in an unanalyzed condition from approximately July 1985 until November 1995."

The violation has been classified at Severity Level III in the NRC's four-level classification system. Severity Level I is the most serious violation. The base civil penalty for a Severity Level III violation is \$50,000.

Cooper has undertaken corrective action that includes removing the fiberglass and restoring the design function of the panels, improving the description of the panels in the updated safety analysis report, inspecting other blowout panels, beginning a review of a random sample of past maintenance work for unreviewed safety questions and unauthorized modifications, and beginning the development of a high energy line break design criteria document.

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