NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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No. III-01-010 March 9, 2001
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NRC STAFF COMPLETES REVIEW OF SAFETY SIGNIFICANCE OF ISSUES AT KEWAUNEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has determined a design concern with strainers in an auxiliary cooling water system at the Kewaunee Nuclear Power Plant to be of "very low safety significance," while two emergency preparedness issues were found to be of greater safety significance. The plant, located at Kewaunee, Wisconsin, is operated by Nuclear Management Company.

The NRC staff made the determinations following two regulatory conferences with the utility on January 30 at the agency's regional office in Lisle, Illinois.

The NRC uses a four-category rating system for its inspection findings; from green, through white and yellow, to red, depicting increasing safety significance. The color assessments are used to determine the NRC's response to the findings, including supplemental inspections or additional meetings with the utility.

The auxiliary feedwater system provides the capability of removing heat from the reactor in the event of an emergency. NRC inspectors were concerned that incorrectly sized strainers in the cooling water supply for the system could clog with lake debris in the event of an earthquake.

The strainer issue, was preliminarily classed as a "white" finding, meaning it was of "low to moderate safety significance, but the classification was changed to "green" following the January 30 meeting. A "green" finding has "very low safety significance" and requires no further NRC action.

The change was based on information presented by the company showing a lesser probability than initially thought that the strainers would be clogged by debris following a possible earthquake.

In the emergency planning area, from January 1999 through July of last year, the plant failed in 16 of 18 monthly drills to show it could staff all emergency response positions within the required time. The NRC staff found, in an August inspection, that the utility had failed to take effective corrective action to deal with the emergency staffing deficiency. This finding was determined to be "white."

In addition to the "white" classification, the NRC staff issued a Notice of Violation to the

company for this issue, and the company was directed to respond to the NRC describing its corrective actions. The NRC will review this emergency preparedness issue during a supplemental inspection later this month.

A second finding -- that Kewaunee had not taken adequate corrective actions after reporting in January of last year that its emergency siren system had a reliability of less than 90 percent -- was found to be “yellow.”

In notifying the company of the “yellow” finding, the NRC stated, “This finding was determined to have substantial safety significance because repetitive performance weaknesses in your corrective action program resulted in your failure to correct performance deficiencies in the public Alert and Notification system (siren system) for an extended period of time.”

Two inspections last year found that Kewaunee had not taken adequate corrective actions for the siren deficiencies. The siren system is intended to notify area residents in the event of an emergency. The inspections found that, while the reliability of the sirens had improved, the plant had not adequately determined and addressed the causes of the siren problems.

The NRC staff met with plant officials on January 9 to discuss the corrective actions underway. The agency also recently completed its third inspection addressing the emergency siren system problems. The inspection report will be issued later this month.

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