January 17, 2002

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF AN ALERT -- PNO-IV-02-005

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by the Headquarters staff on this date.

Washington State University
Nuclear Radiation Center
Pullman, WA
Docket: 50-027
License: R-76

Licensee Emergency Classification
Notification of Unusual Event
X Alert
Site Area Emergency
General Emergency
Not Applicable

SUBJECT: ALERT DECLARED DUE TO PULSE ROD FOUND STUCK FROM THE FULL IN POSITION

DESCRIPTION:

At 12:22 p.m. EST on January 17, 2002, the licensee notified the NRC Operations Center that they had declared an Alert under their emergency plan. The licensee had discovered that the research reactor pulse rod was not in the fully inserted position (stuck approximately two inches from full insertion). Full travel for the pulse rod (full in to full out) is 15 inches. The licensee reported that the reactor is fully shutdown (shutdown margin was estimated at $2.75), and there is no radioactive release or contamination.

During startup to complete a scheduled power calibration of the reactor the pervious day, the licensee found that control rod withdrawal was greater than expected for the attained power level. The licensee shutdown the reactor and initiated an assessment of the anomaly.

At approximately 11:55 a.m. EST January 17, 2002, while continuing their assessment, the licensee discovered that the pulse rod was approximately two inches from full insertion. Following their emergency procedures, the facility was evacuated at approximately 12:00 noon EST. After evaluating the situation in accordance with their emergency procedures, the Emergency Director allowed staff to return to the facility. The licensee made required emergency notifications.

Currently, the licensee is continuing to follow their emergency procedures, evaluating procedures to resolve the stuck pulse rod, and consulting their Safeguards Committee. The licensee will notify the NRC when they have terminated the Alert.

The NRC Office of Public Affairs and the Executive Director of Operations have been notified. The state of Washington has been informed.

This information is current as of 2:30 p.m. EST on January 17, 2002.

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