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NRC CITES POINT BEACH NUCLEAR STATION FOR VIOLATION OF LOW TO MODERATE SAFETY SIGNIFICANCE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff issued its final determination that a violation of NRC safety regulations at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, should be characterized as "white," meaning that it is an issue of low to moderate importance to safety. The plant, which has two reactors, is operated by Nuclear Management Company.

On February 20 a pump in the safety injection system, one of the Unit 2 emergency cooling systems, failed because of a build up of nitrogen gas in the associated piping. The nitrogen had leaked into the piping from the safety injection accumulators, another part of the plant emergency systems which could inject water into the reactor cooling system using pressurized nitrogen in the event of an accident.

Under its safety significance determination process, NRC officials classify certain conditions at nuclear power plants as being one of four colors which delineate increasing levels of safety significance, beginning with green and progressing to white, yellow or red.

A preliminary "white" determination for the pump failure was described in an inspection report issued May 14. The letter transmitting the report provided the company with an opportunity to request a regulatory conference to discuss this issue. Nuclear Management Company subsequently informed the NRC that it did not contest the "white" characterization of the safety significance of this finding and did not request a meeting with the NRC staff.

In addition to the "white" determination, the NRC issued a Notice of Violation to Nuclear Management Company for failing to take prompt corrective action to prevent the pump failure.

In April 2000 the utility, in response to an Information Notice issued by the NRC, found that the safety injection pumps were susceptible to damage in the event of nitrogen leakage from the accumulators into the safety injection piping. On two subsequent occasions, plant operators observed decreasing levels in the safety injection accumulators, indicating possible nitrogen leakage. Corrective actions, which might have precluded the February 20 pump damage, were not taken.

The white finding will result in a future NRC inspection focusing on the plant's corrective action program and its response to the pump failure.

The notice to the utility of the final safety significance is available on the NRC web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/what-we-do/regulatory/enforcement/current.html/reactors>.

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