

Employee Update
NRC issues preliminary red finding to Point Beach
April 5, 2002

The NRC has issued a preliminary red finding to Point Beach for apparent violations concerning the plant's auxiliary feedwater pumps. Plant employees discovered the potential common mode failures in late November as part of a comprehensive risk assessment model improvement process. The matter was immediately reported to NRC and prompt interim corrective actions were implemented.

The NRC is expected to publicly announce the preliminary red finding on Monday. At that time, NMC will issue a news release, highlighting Point Beach's request for a regulatory conference to review why the plant believes that further NRC action is unnecessary.

The discovery by plant staff was a good catch of a situation that was not self-revealing, the corrective actions have been appropriate, and the design was consistent with the original plant design and license. While operators are trained to handle these situations, the control room procedures were not explicit about actions the operators should take to prevent damage to these pumps.

As the plant was designed, the recirculation valves for the auxiliary feedwater pumps are operated by an air system that is not safety-related and has no back-up. If the air system were lost, the valves would automatically close. This could reduce the amount of water flowing through the pumps and cause them to overheat if operators throttled down on the pumps' unaffected discharge valves in response to plant conditions.

Point Beach staff discovered that in certain scenarios, the auxiliary feedwater pumps could overheat if operators did not take the proper actions to maintain enough flow of water through the pumps, which are self-cooling. This is consistent with our plant design and license and the system is fully operable. Point Beach discovered that the control room procedures were not explicit about actions the operators should take to prevent damage to these pumps in all situations.

Point Beach has updated the procedures to ensure operators have explicit guidance that matches training and to ensure the situation is not overlooked. Point Beach also has installed backup air supplies for the valves.

The NRC announcement is expected to prompt news media coverage, as this is only the second red inspection finding in the industry. The Indian Point nuclear plant received a red finding following its steam generator tube rupture.

Under the new NRC reactor oversight program, situations like this undergo review to determine their significance. Additionally, the NRC process recognizes that some situations can exist that are not appropriately characterized by the "color" of the finding. The NRC recently amended its procedures to address such situations so that inappropriate enforcement actions are not taken against plant operators for aggressively pursuing and correcting old design issues. NMC will discuss this issue with the NRC.

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