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NRC SPECIAL INSPECTION STARTS AT SUSQUEHANNA NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a special inspection at the Susquehanna nuclear power plant in response to several events involving loose bolts on emergency diesel generators. The twin-reactor plant is located in Berwick, Pa., and operated by PPL Susquehanna, LLC.

The purpose of the inspection, which got under way today, is to determine the facts surrounding the discovery that several bolts on emergency diesel generators at the plant were found to be not fully tightened during the period from March 2003 through January. Among other things, the team will independently evaluate the adequacy and quality of PPL's response and the risk significance of the problem.

Nuclear power plants generate and transmit electricity to the grid, but they also receive power back for operational purposes. If the flow of that off-site power is interrupted, emergency diesel generators are relied upon to power key safety systems and safely shut down the plant. As such, their proper functioning is of vital importance to plant safety. The Susquehanna plant has five emergency diesel generators.

In March 2003, a bolt on a linkage that controls the diesel fuel supply for one of the plant's emergency diesel generators fell off during routine testing, forcing the engine's shutdown. On January 25 -- again during routine testing -- PPL found the mounting bolts for the governor, or control, on another emergency diesel generator were not fully tightened. In addition, workers observed oil leaking from under the control. That engine also had to be shut down during testing due to the problems. Subsequently, PPL on January 30 identified several bolts that were not fully tightened on a lube oil cooler, or heat exchanger, for a third emergency diesel generator.

The three-member NRC team will document its findings in an inspection report that will be issued no more than 45 days after the exit meeting for the review.

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