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NRC TO CONDUCT SPECIAL INSPECTION AT PALO VERDE NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a special inspection to evaluate problems related to a new steam generator and the operation of the shutdown cooling system at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, located 50 miles west of Phoenix, Arizona.

On February 19, operators shut down Palo Verde Unit 2 after monitors detected a minute leak in one of two steam generators that had been replaced last fall. Despite some problems subsequently encountered, the plant remained in a safe condition at all times and there was no danger to public health or safety. After the reactor cooled, operators reduced the level of water in the reactor coolant system to facilitate access to the leaking steam generator. However, problems with some equipment led them to prolong the time that the plant remained in this condition. Workers discovered that air had displaced some of the water in the reactor shutdown cooling system, forcing them to open valves to vent air into the auxiliary building every two hours.

The NRC staff has decided to conduct a special inspection to evaluate the adequacy of the licensee's response to the situation, the root cause, and corrective actions.

The NRC's Special Inspection Team, consisting of two reactor engineers from the NRC's Region IV Office in Arlington, Texas, an inspector from the Callaway nuclear plant in Missouri, and a Headquarters specialist, arrived on site last week and have begun their review.

The inspection report will be issued about four weeks after the inspection is completed, and will be available on the agency's web site and through its Electronic Reading Room at: <http://www.nrc.gov> as an Agencywide Document Access and Management System (ADAMS) document. Help in using ADAMS is available through the NRC Public Document Room at 301-417-4737 or 1-800-397-4209.

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