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NRC, FPL TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATION AT SEABROOK NUCLEAR PLANT

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of FPL Seabrook, LLC, on Sept. 23 to discuss an apparent violation of agency requirements at the Seabrook nuclear power plant. The company operates the plant, which is located in Seabrook, N.H.

The meeting, known as a Predecisional Enforcement Conference, will begin at 9 a.m. in the Public Meeting Room at the NRC's Region I Office, 475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. The meeting will be open to the public. Interested members of the public will have an opportunity to ask questions of NRC staff before the meeting is adjourned.

The apparent violation involves a portion of NRC regulations known as 10 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 50.59. Under 10 CFR 50.59, nuclear power plant operators may make changes to their facilities without prior NRC approval but only if certain requirements are met.

When the plant was licensed, the Safety Evaluation Report stated that the plant's circulating-water system (the system that draws water from the ocean, circulates it to cool various plant components and then discharges it) had the potential to flood the turbine building if one of its lines ruptured and its pumps were not halted. However, the safety evaluation further noted that even if the pumps continued to operate, scuppers, or drains, and doors that were to be installed in the turbine building would cause the water to flow out to the yard and away from plant structures. In addition, water level alarms were to be installed in the circulating-water pits in the turbine building to alert the control room of a system rupture.

In 1997, Seabrook determined that neither the scuppers nor the pit level alarms had been installed. In response, the level alarms were installed, but the scuppers were not. Instead, the scuppers were removed from the plant's FSAR. Seabrook took that action based on a 10 CFR 50.59 evaluation it conducted that indicated NRC approval was not needed.

Based on an inspection completed on June 30 of this year, NRC inspectors have concluded that the change to eliminate the scuppers required prior NRC approval.

At the Predecisional Enforcement Conference, FPL Seabrook will be able to present additional information concerning the issue, including the safety significance of the change.

No decision will be made at the conference. Rather, NRC staff will take information provided under consideration and render a decision regarding any possible enforcement action in the near future.

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