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Coalition Asks For Explanation Of Millstone Reactor Shutdown
 By THOMAS D. WILLIAMS
 Courant Staff Writer

April 22 2005

In light of a special federal inquiry into Sunday's shutdown at the Millstone Nuclear Power Complex in Waterford, the Connecticut Coalition Against Millstone is inviting the plant's operator to a public meeting to explain the event.

Nancy Burton, the coalition's head, is also calling for a congressional investigation of the incident and asking that coalition representatives be allowed to attend the current federal inspection of the plant. So far, Burton said, she has received no response from the plant's owner, Dominion Nuclear of Connecticut Inc., and no indication whether Congress will agree to her request.

"The shutdown illustrated multiple equipment failures in systems which have suffered repeated malfunctions and are degraded, according to 2004 NRC inspection reports," said Burton.

Dominion has passed a Nuclear Regulatory Commission evaluation of its 2004 operations. But now the NRC is conducting a special inspection of the plant after the shutdown.

"Whenever there is an event like this - a shutdown with complications - we consider whether additional inspection is warranted. In this case, it crossed the threshold," said Neil Sheehan, a spokesman for the NRC.

"At 8:29 a.m. Sunday," said the NRC, "the reactor experienced an automatic shutdown from full power. That activated one of two safety subsystems. As the reactor was shutting down, multiple steam line safety valves lifted and at

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least one main steam safety valve appeared to remain open. It was the failure of the valve to re-close that resulted in the declaration of an Alert at 8:42 a.m." An alert is the second-lowest of four levels of emergency NRC classification.

The inspectors will try to determine what caused the large release of steam that Dominion has characterized as clean emissions. But the NRC characterized the emissions as "no releases of radioactivity above allowable levels."

An inspector from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is expected to participate as an observer. The NRC team will issue its written finding within 45 days after an exit meeting with company officials, Sheehan said. Inspectors will scrutinize Dominion's "root cause analysis report" when it becomes available, Sheehan said.

"We're not going to bring the unit back on line until the NRC is satisfied and we're satisfied that it is safe to do so," Peter Hyde, a spokesman for Dominion, said Wednesday.

With the shutdown of the Millstone3 nuclear reactor, all of the complex's reactors are off line and not producing electricity. Millstone 1 is being decommissioned, and Millstone 2 is temporarily shut down for refueling.

Millstone has had similar shutdowns in the past, the last coming two years ago, when Unit 2 went off line. A federal report determined that Millstone engineers did not do proper tests when they made changes to pumps and valves. The pumps malfunctioned. Fewer than 50 gallons of radioactive water leaked out, and some radioactive steam was released. In December 2002, Millstone 3 shut down when a problem developed with its turbine.

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