



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT HATCH NUCLEAR PLANT TO REVIEW SHUTDOWN

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission Region II office in Atlanta will conduct a special inspection at the Hatch nuclear power plant, operated by Southern Nuclear Operating Company near Baxley, Ga., to assess the circumstances surrounding an unplanned reactor shutdown at Hatch Unit 2 on April 5.

The April 5th shutdown was initiated by a maintenance error during testing on the Unit 2 turbine generator. During that shutdown, condenser vacuum significantly decreased in part due to the operators having to manually control part of the operation because some automatic equipment had not been repaired after the last refueling outage.

The condenser in a nuclear power plant condenses and recovers the steam that passes through the turbine. The steam turning the turbine at a boiling-water reactor plant such as Hatch is heated in the reactor itself and returned to the reactor once it is condensed. All power plants, including coal-fired plants, that use steam as the driving force for the turbine generator use a condenser. During a nuclear plant shutdown, maintaining a vacuum in the condenser allows plant operators to use additional sources of water and heat removal. Any loss of that capability may result in the necessity to use backup plant systems for cooling.

The NRC inspectors will assess the sequence of events, the plant staff's response, any corrective actions and any possible generic safety implications.

The two inspectors involved in the special inspection are the NRC Senior Resident Inspector at the Hatch plant and a Senior Resident Inspector from another plant. The two inspectors are expected to complete their on-site review the week of April 10th and the results of the inspection will be issued within 45 days of its completion.

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