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NRC CITES FENOC FOR VIOLATION AT BEAVER VALLEY NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has cited the company that operates the Beaver Valley nuclear power plant for a violation of agency requirements that occurred in 2005. The violation is related to the preparation of a work package that was to be used for the replacement of the Beaver Valley Unit 1 reactor vessel head earlier this year. The enforcement action – the details of which were determined during the NRC’s Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) process – requires FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Co. (FENOC) to take several actions to prevent recurrence.

As noted in a letter to FENOC on July 31, 2006, an investigation conducted by the agency’s Office of Investigations (OI) confirmed a finding identified by FENOC and reported to the NRC in 2005 that a former contract mechanical engineer at the Shippingport (Beaver County), Pa., plant had failed to complete required work for an Engineering Change Package (ECP). Specifically, OI confirmed that the engineer did not attach all of the necessary evaluations for the reactor vessel head replacement but signed a document on June 1, 2005, indicating the ECP was complete. OI determined the engineer’s actions were deliberate.

FENOC responded to the letter by requesting the use of the ADR process. ADR, in this context, refers to a process in which a neutral mediator with no decision-making authority assists the NRC and license-holders in reaching an agreement resolving any differences regarding an enforcement action. Toward that end, an ADR mediation session was held between FENOC and the NRC at the agency’s Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa., on Sept. 28, 2006.

As a result of that session, a settlement agreement was reached. The terms have now been confirmed by the NRC via a Confirmatory Order issued to FENOC. Under the agreement, the NRC and FENOC agree that the contract mechanical engineer deliberately failed to adhere to a procedural requirement; that the violation most closely qualifies as a Severity Level IV – the least significant of four severity levels used by the NRC – based on its technical merits; and that the violation should be classified as a Severity Level III given its deliberate nature.

In addition, the NRC acknowledges that within two weeks of the occurrence, FENOC identified the ECP was not complete. This happened very early in the design change process, approximately 8 months prior to the start of the outage in which the head was replaced. The company’s design process included additional reviews before official acceptance of the work. Also, a

new ECP was completed after the problem was discovered, and the new ECP was deemed satisfactory. Therefore, there was no actual safety impact of the violation.

Further, FENOC implemented corrective actions to prevent a recurrence. These steps included conducting a thorough review of previous work by the contractor; retraining Beaver Valley engineering personnel in 2005; and taking disciplinary action against responsible individuals. As a result of the ADR mediation session, FENOC has agreed to take additional steps, including: submittal of an operating experience report to the rest of the industry, conveying lessons learned; using a case-study format, providing lessons-learned training to engineers at all of its nuclear facilities; and modifying procedures to further clarify the intent of the responsible engineer's signature.

The agreement requires FENOC to complete the additional steps by June 30, 2007. The company must respond and provide the NRC with a final report within 30 days of completion of those actions.

A copy of the enforcement action will be posted on the NRC web site at:
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions/> .

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