



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region IV
611 Ryan Plaza Drive – Suite 400
Arlington, Texas 76011-4005

No. IV-07-038
Contact: Victor Dricks
Phone: (817) 860-8128

October 22, 2007
E-Mail: opa4@nrc.gov

NRC ISSUES CONFIRMATORY ORDERS TO ARIZONA PUBLIC SERVICE CO. & FORMER EMPLOYEE REQUIRING CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued Confirmatory Orders requiring Arizona Public Service Co. (APS) and one of its former senior reactor operators to take corrective actions following an incident in which the individual falsified a computer record at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station to cover up a mistake. The company operates the plant, located 50 miles west of Phoenix.

APS has agreed to the terms of a Confirmatory Order that requires it to develop special training for reactor operators to emphasize the importance of reporting errors, performing independent work verifications, and deterring individuals from concealing mistakes.

The terms of the Confirmatory Order were agreed to following Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), which uses a neutral mediator with no decision-making authority to assist the NRC and its licensees in resolving differences regarding enforcement actions.

The Confirmatory Order also requires APS to perform assessments of independent verification processes in its operations and maintenance departments within the next year and implement a plan for ensuring that actions it takes to improve these processes are effective.

A separate Confirmatory Order requires Mark Sharp, a former Palo Verde senior reactor operator who mistakenly entered incorrect information into a plant computer during a maintenance operation on Nov. 8, 2006, and subsequently attempted to cover up the mistake by falsifying the record, to take a number of corrective actions.

“As a result of the Alternative Dispute Resolution process both APS and the individual involved in this incident will be required to take corrective actions to preclude this from recurring,” said NRC Region IV Administrator Elmo E. Collins.

Before Sharp returned for the next shift later the same day, the error and falsification were discovered. He was immediately removed from the control room and his plant access was suspended. Sharp resigned six days later. Plant management took other prompt corrective actions by counseling Sharp as well as other operators that stand watch in the control room to report their mistakes.

Sharp's mistake caused the plant's computers to under report thermal power by 0.3 percent, but did not endanger public health and safety. Although this was an isolated incident, it was deemed significant because the NRC places a high value on the integrity and trustworthiness of plant personnel, particularly supervisors and licensed operators.

The Confirmatory Order limits Sharp's activities in the industry until he takes certain actions. He must write an article for an industry magazine describing the incident and lessons learned and submit a written report on the incident to the Institute for Nuclear Power Operations, a nuclear industry group.

Copies of the Confirmatory Orders issued by NRC to APS and the individual involved in the incident will be available on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html> . The NRC also includes significant enforcement actions at: <http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/regulatory/enforcement.html> .

###

NRC news releases are available through a free list serve subscription at the following Web address: <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/listserver.html> . The NRC homepage at www.nrc.gov also offers a SUBSCRIBE link. E-mail notifications are sent to subscribers when news releases are posted to NRC's Web site.