



NRC NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs, Region II
61 Forsyth Street SW, Atlanta GA 30303
Web Site: www.nrc.gov

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CONTACT: Ken Clark (404)562-4416
Roger Hannah (404)562-4417

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E-mail: OPA2@nrc.gov

NRC INCREASES OVERSIGHT OF BOTH FARLEY NUCLEAR PLANT UNITS AND ISSUES CONFIRMATORY ACTION LETTER ON BREAKERS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff recently increased oversight of Unit 2 at the Farley nuclear power plant, and in an assessment letter to Southern Nuclear Operating Company, the agency notified the company that it is now subjecting Unit 1 to the same level of oversight. The Farley nuclear plant is located near Dothan, Ala.

“The Farley plant is being operated safely,” said NRC Regional Administrator William Travers, “but there are performance issues that need to be addressed by the licensee.”

Under the NRC reactor oversight process, an inspection finding is assigned a color indicating its safety significance. Findings with very low safety significance are labeled "green." "White" findings have low to moderate safety significance, "yellow" findings have substantial safety significance, and "red" findings have high safety significance. Performance indicators at a plant are also assigned colors based on numerical values for each indicator.

For Farley Unit 2, the NRC issued a “yellow” finding and Notice of Violation in October for the failure of a Residual Heat Removal (RHR) containment sump suction valve to fully open two separate times. That finding put Unit 2 in the “degraded cornerstone” column.

A Unit 1 Cooling Water Systems Performance Indicator recently crossed the threshold from “green” to “white.” This resulted from additional unplanned unavailability time when breakers in the component cooling water system failed to close on two occasions.

In August, the NRC staff completed an inspection for a “white” Performance Indicator primarily due to service water pump breaker failures. The NRC opened a parallel “white” Performance Indicator inspection finding for both units. As a result of the additional “white” Performance Indicator on Unit 1 and the parallel “white” Performance Indicator inspection finding, the NRC staff placed Unit 1 in the “degraded cornerstone” column.

The “degraded cornerstone” column is the third of five columns in the NRC action matrix, and the plant will be subject to a supplemental NRC inspection to provide assurance that the root causes and causes of the performance issues are understood, the extent of condition is identified, and the corrective actions are sufficient to prevent recurrence.

The NRC staff has also issued a separate letter, known as a Confirmatory Action Letter or CAL, to Southern Nuclear confirming details of the company's plans to address electrical breaker issues at the Farley plant. A letter from Southern Nuclear to the NRC in late October described the company's actions, either completed or planned, including an eleven point inspection process and a breaker oversight team to review inspection results.

The Confirmatory Action Letter remains open until the NRC has concluded that Southern Nuclear's actions are complete and corrective actions were effective. Issuance of the NRC letter does not preclude the NRC from taking enforcement action for violations of NRC requirements.

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