



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT OYSTER CREEK NUCLEAR PLANT

The NRC has initiated a Special Inspection at the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant in response to a shutdown of the reactor early on July 12. The inspection got under way today at the plant, which is located in Lacey Township (Ocean County), N.J., and operated by Exelon.

Among other things, the team of four NRC inspectors will be tasked with reviewing whether any equipment issues, design deficiencies, communication challenges and/or operator performance issues complicated the event. The Special Inspection will expand on reviews conducted by the NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to Oyster Creek immediately after the shutdown. Assisting the team on a part-time basis will be the NRC's Senior Resident Inspector at the plant.

“While the plant was safely removed from service during the event, several equipment issues arose during the shutdown that we believe bear closer examination,” NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins said. “Through this Special Inspection we intend to gain a better understanding of these issues, including the actions taken by plant operators in response.”

At 1:35 a.m. on July 12, with severe weather moving through the area, a lightning strike on an off-site electrical distribution system caused an electrical fault, resulting in a loss of off-site power for Oyster Creek. (Nuclear power plants send power out onto the grid, but they also take back a certain amount for operational purposes.) As designed, the plant's emergency diesel generators started and began providing power to plant safety systems.

An Unusual Event – the lowest of four levels of emergency classification used by the NRC -- was declared at 1:48 a.m. because the loss of off-site power was expected to last for more than 15 minutes. Off-site power was subsequently restored at 3:05 a.m. and the Unusual Event was terminated at 4:05 a.m.

Several equipment anomalies were observed during the shutdown, including: a switchyard breaker that is used to isolate the off-site electrical distribution system failing to open to clear an electrical fault, which resulted in the loss of off-site power; an emergency diesel

generator taking longer than expected to start and load its respective power distribution system; and problems involving level indication equipment for an isolation condenser, a component used to help cool down the reactor during shutdowns.

The NRC will issue a report on the results of the Special Inspection within 45 days of its completion.

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