



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region III

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Web site: www.nrc.gov

No. III-03-081

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December 22, 2003

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NRC OVERSIGHT PANEL TO MEET WITH FIRSTENERGY TO REVIEW DAVIS-BESSE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Davis-Besse Oversight Panel will meet with FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company officials on December 29 in Oak Harbor, Ohio, to review the utility's planned corrective actions to address NRC inspection findings on operational performance and safety culture.

The plant, operated by FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company near Oak Harbor, Ohio, has been shut down since February 16 of last year as a result of corrosion damage to its reactor vessel head.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. in the Oak Harbor High School Auditorium, 11661 West State Route 163, in Oak Harbor. The public is invited to observe the business portion of the meeting and will have an opportunity to make comments and ask questions of the NRC staff before the meeting is adjourned.

The December 29 meeting was previously planned to discuss the possible startup of the Davis-Besse plant. The startup discussion will be deferred, however, until the NRC reviews the corrective actions to be discussed by FirstEnergy and performs further inspections at the plant.

The NRC staff presented the findings of two recent inspections in a public meeting on December 19: the Restart Readiness Assessment Team Inspection, which reviewed the readiness of the plant staff and equipment to support the safety restart of the plant, and the Management and Human Performance Inspection, which reviewed FirstEnergy's program to assess and improve the safety culture of the plant staff.

The restart readiness team found instances where the plans for work activities were inadequate, where operators lacked awareness of plant equipment status, where work control appeared disorganized, and where operators were not following management expectations and written

procedures and standards. Some of these problems were similar to ones which occurred during the reactor cooling system test in September, indicating that corrective actions at that time may not have been effective.

The safety culture inspection team found that programs to assess the safety culture and the safety-conscious work environment at Davis-Besse were adequate and went well beyond regulatory requirements. A recent survey of the plant staff by the utility showed an overall improvement in safety culture attitudes, but also indicated an unexplained decline in attitudes toward safety in several important plant departments. Because of this decline, the survey results require additional assessment and action by the utility.

At the December 29 meeting, FirstEnergy will be expected to respond to the findings of the two NRC inspections: (1) assessing the causes of the operational problems and the decline reflected in the safety culture survey; (2) determining what actions are necessary to address the issues; (3) explaining why previous corrective actions were apparently not effective; and (4) developing a program to measure the effectiveness of the new corrective actions.

The transcript of the meeting will be posted in several weeks on the NRC's web site - <http://www.nrc.gov>. Select "Davis-Besse" from the Key Topics menu. Documents on the Davis-Besse corrosion issue, including further details on NRC's oversight panel activities, are posted on the NRC's web site.

The NRC oversight panel includes NRC management and staff from its Region III office in Lisle, Illinois; the NRC Headquarters office in Rockville, Maryland; and the NRC Resident Inspector Office at the Davis-Besse site.

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