



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT COLUMBIA GENERATING STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission today launched a special inspection at the Columbia Generating Station to review the circumstances surrounding three events in which operators inadvertently drained reactor coolant from the plant's reactor vessel during a recent refueling outage. The plant, near Richland, Wash., is operated by Energy Northwest.

The three events, which involved problems with the alignment of valves on the reactor coolant system and level instrumentation, occurred during a refueling outage at Columbia that began on April 2.

Two other incidents which will be reviewed involved temporary loss of shutdown cooling due to an electrical malfunction and the unexpected insertion of a control rod into the reactor core during a scheduled test. All of these incidents occurred while the reactor was shut down.

"All of these events had very low risk significance because the reactor was in a safe shut down condition," said NRC Region IV Administrator Elmo E. Collins. "But they all appear to have involved poor operator controls and warrant close examination."

A team of three NRC inspectors, who will begin their work today, will evaluate each event, review the licensee's root cause analysis and determine if corrective actions taken are adequate to prevent recurrence.

The NRC inspectors will write an inspection report on their findings within 45 days of the end of the inspection that will be publicly available.

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