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Expanding Public Outreach in California

This past weekend, NRC set up information booths at two events that each drew several thousand attendees. On Thursday, Aug. 23, the resident inspectors from the [Diablo Canyon nuclear plant](#) joined two public affairs officers as well as the Director of the Office of Public Affairs at San Luis Obispo Market Night.

Every Thursday night, city officials close off the downtown area in San Luis Obispo and set up a street fair. NRC staffers interacted with about 75 individuals, answering questions on a wide range of issues ranging from seismic safety to nuclear waste storage and transportation. This is the third year that NRC has attended the SLO Market Nights, setting up a booth in order to provide brochures about agency programs and functions as well as answer questions from members of the community.



San Onofre Senior Resident Inspector Greg Warnick (left) and Resident Inspector John Reynoso at the Dana Point Safety Expo.

On Saturday, Aug. 25, we did the same thing at a safety expo in Dana Point, Calif., where we appeared side by side with representatives from numerous Orange County public safety organizations. We set up a booth where we were joined by the resident inspectors from [San Onofre](#).

There, about 200 individuals came to the NRC booth where NRC staffers answered questions, distributed literature and shared our safety message. We got lots of questions about steam generator issues at the plant and brought with us large posters that we used to describe the nature of the problems and NRC's role in ensuring public safety.

These appearances are part of an ongoing effort in Region IV to expand our public outreach initiatives and develop new ways of communicating the agency's mission and public safety goals with the public.

Victor Dricks

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The Calvert Cliffs Decision – What’s Next?

A panel of judges on the NRC’s [Atomic Safety and Licensing Board](#) has completed its hearing on challenges to an [application](#) to build a new nuclear power plant at Calvert Cliffs in Maryland. Board hearings are one part of the NRC’s process for determining whether a new reactor can be approved.



The judges’ rulings have enough moving parts that we’re taking the unusual step of providing this brief summary to make sure everything’s clearly understood.

Most importantly, the judges ruled that the applicant, UniStar, is completely foreign-owned and therefore the NRC cannot give UniStar a license until they’ve resolved this issue. When the company submitted its application in 2007, UniStar was a joint venture between Maryland-based Constellation and the French company EDF. That arrangement was challenged by several environmental groups, but in late 2010 EDF bought Constellation’s portion and made UniStar foreign-owned.

The judges ruled that UniStar has 60 days from today to provide proof of progress towards a partnership with a U.S. company that meets the NRC’s requirements. Without that proof, the judges will end the hearing. After 60 days, UniStar would have to fulfill additional requirements to re-start the hearing if they found a U.S. partner.

Another panel of judges is considering a new reactor application for a site in Texas that also examines foreign ownership issues, but under different circumstances.

The Calvert Cliffs judges had other issues to consider, and they ruled on those too so that if UniStar finds a suitable U.S. partner in the future, the NRC could continue its overall review of the application.

The judges examined a challenge to the NRC’s environmental review. The groups opposed to the application argued the agency’s review failed to properly account for possible increases in solar and wind power as an alternative to a new reactor. The judges said that argument was correct when the hearing started, but all the information considered during the hearing corrected the agency’s error. The judges ruled the environmental review as it exists today is acceptable.

The judges also ruled on the groups’ attempt to offer a new argument based on the lessons learned from last year’s Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear accident in Japan. The groups claimed the Calvert Cliffs environmental review would be incomplete until the NRC considered information from the agency’s Fukushima task force report, including possible improvements for dealing with reactor accidents.

The judges ruled that, while the groups filed their argument within the time allowed by the NRC’s rules, the judges must abide by a March 16, 2012, decision from the agency’s five Commissioners. That decision rejected a similar argument in other hearings, concluding the argument

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failed to point out how Fukushima's events directly related to the applications under review. The Calvert Cliffs judges ruled the same situation applies here, and therefore the groups' argument must be rejected.

One judge provided a separate opinion that, even if the earlier Commission decision didn't apply, the groups failed to show how their argument could alter the environmental impacts enough to require additional agency review. Another judge provided a separate opinion that a portion of the groups' argument could be acceptable if the earlier Commission decision didn't apply.

As is the case with all Atomic Safety and Licensing Board decisions, the ruling can be appealed to the NRC's five Commissioners.

Scott Burnell

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NRC Watching Isaac — Weekend Update

As Tropical Storm Isaac develops off the Gulf coast, one only hopes that it will lessen in force and simply bring much needed rains. But the reality is that NRC staff prepares for adverse conditions — to include hurricane force winds in excess of 75 mph — and takes action before the storm even hits the ground.

As recently as yesterday, when nuclear power plants were busy taking severe weather precautions, such as tying down loose equipment, removing debris that could become projectiles, and topping off water and fuel tanks, the NRC ramped up staff to assist the resident inspectors at three plants.

Currently, Waterford and River Bend in Louisiana, and Grand Gulf in Mississippi have an additional six NRC inspectors who will ride out the storm inside the plant alongside the plants' emergency and operations personnel. Additional staff are ready and waiting to relieve this group, and will be monitoring plant activities to ensure safe operations on a 24/7 basis.

As news agencies report on Isaac's projected path, the NRC Region IV incident response team in Arlington, Texas, monitors the National Weather Service and uses specially created software to monitor wind speeds at the plants. This team went to work at noon today and will provide continuous coverage throughout the night as it stays in touch with the resident inspectors, FEMA, state and other federal partners.

We will keep you posted about the plants' status after the eye of the storm makes landfall.



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Weekend Update: After FEMA assessed the status of emergency services in the area and the NRC reviewed the plant's onsite emergency preparedness program and infrastructure, the NRC has determined Waterford 3 can resume power operations.

Thursday Update: While the NRC's Region IV incident response team will continue to watch the storm's path and additional NRC inspectors will stay at the plants through the duration of the storm, the region has exited our first level of response mode of operations known as "monitoring mode." Currently, Waterford remains powered down and the NRC will have to approve restart. Additionally, FEMA will have to determine that the evacuation routes in the area are passable. Once the storm has passed, NRC inspectors will independently verify that key plant systems and structures are undamaged and able to support plant operations.

Wednesday Update: The NRC's Region IV Office in Arlington, Texas, activated its Incident Response Center Tuesday night to track Hurricane Isaac and monitor the activities of the nuclear plants in the storm's projected path. Yesterday afternoon, the Waterford site in Louisiana began a controlled plant shutdown due to the possibility of adverse conditions generated by the storm. Both the River Bend plant, in Louisiana, and the Grand Gulf plant in Mississippi remain at full power.

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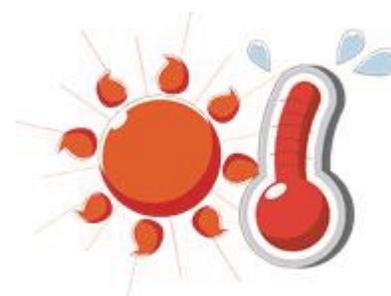
Emergency Preparedness and Response

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Keeping Cool: Record Temperatures and Nuclear Safety

The unusually hot summer across much of the country has not only taken a toll on our lawns and plants, it's also slowly raised the temperature of some of our lakes and rivers. Many nuclear power plants rely on lakes or rivers for water to cool the plant. So, what is the effect of slowly-rising water temperatures?

If the temperature of the water used to cool the plant rises too high, a plant may have to reduce the amount of electricity it generates. Reducing electrical output reduces the heat generated by the plant, so that the plant can be safely cooled even with higher-than-normal temperatures of intake water.



The NRC requires that intake water temperature be continuously monitored to make sure that appropriate action is taken before any safety limits are exceeded. This year, a few plants have had to either reduce power or seek special NRC approval in order to temporarily operate with higher-than-normal cooling water temperatures. Unit 2 of the [Millstone plant](#) in Connecticut has had to temporarily shut down because of warm water temperatures.

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What about water that is discharged from a plant after it has been used to for cooling? If the temperature of that water is too high, it can harm aquatic life or have other impacts on water quality. So, a plant may need to reduce electrical output to keep the discharged water sufficiently cool, or request special permission to exceed permissible temperature limits, which are set by other federal and state regulators with responsibility for water quality.

With autumn approaching, the temperatures will fall. Even after the summer heat passes, the NRC will continue to ensure plants closely monitor the temperature of their cooling systems. Whatever the season, safety remains the agency's top priority.

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The North Anna Earthquake – One Year Later

Early in the afternoon last August 23, people living near the small town of Mineral, Va., felt a 5.8 magnitude earthquake. That earthquake also hit the nearby [North Anna Nuclear Power Station](#). The plant, operated by Dominion, automatically shut down and lost electrical power from off site. The plant staff declared an Alert, the second-lowest of four NRC emergency classifications, and shut down safely.



The NRC's resident inspectors began reviewing the plant's response to the event immediately. A broader NRC inspection, called an Augmented Inspection Team or AIT, was launched soon after the event and those inspectors began assessing Dominion's actions following the earthquake and conducting an independent review.

That inspection team found that the plant staff responded appropriately. Although the ground motion exceeded some levels for which the plant was originally licensed, there was no damage to safety equipment and safety systems functioned during the quake. Another extensive NRC inspection was later completed as part of reviewing the plant's readiness to restart.

The NRC staff began that technical review to evaluate Dominion's post-quake inspections, steps required for restart and other long-term actions. The inspections and technical review led the NRC to conclude in November that both of the North Anna units could be operated following the earthquake without undue risk to the public. The NRC also issued a letter to Dominion that legally binds the company to its commitments, such as incorporating analyses and information from the quake into future plant license documents as well as continued reviews of equipment and systems.

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While the North Anna Power Station survived an earthquake beyond its original design with no significant damage, the NRC continues to [evaluate information from the earthquake](#) and the plant staff has installed additional seismic and backup equipment. Despite the good news at North Anna, the NRC earthquake story does not end there.

Six years before the earthquake near North Anna, the NRC staff began evaluating updated seismic models and methods for analyzing earthquake hazards. That effort, which includes all nuclear plants, was rolled into the lessons learned from the event at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011. U.S. plants will use those updated methods to determine if additional improvements to reduce seismic risk at some plants are warranted.

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