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NRC Issues ‘White’ Inspection Finding for Calvert Cliffs 2 Nuclear Plant; Level of Oversight to be Increased

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will increase its level of oversight at the Calvert Cliffs Unit 2 nuclear power plant based on the finalization of a white (low to moderate safety significance) inspection finding for the Lusby, Md., facility. The finding involves one of the internal radiation measurements that would be used to determine the level of an emergency at the plant in the event of a severe accident.

In an inspection report issued on Aug. 8, the NRC staff discussed the preliminary classification of the finding as white. The basic details of the finding are as follows:

One of the means by which Calvert Cliffs personnel would determine plant radiation levels during an accident would be by checking main steam line radiation monitors. Based on those readings, they would determine if an emergency declaration was necessary and, if so, at what level.

In October 2013, the Unit 2 monitors were replaced with new instrumentation that used different units of measurement and required recalculated thresholds for different levels of emergency. During monitor replacements for Unit 1 in March 2014, plant personnel raised questions about the Unit 2 threshold calculations. That led to Exelon, the plant’s owner, determining on April 7, 2014, that the Unit 2 Emergency Action Levels (EALs) were inaccurate and could have led to emergency events being improperly classified.

“Nuclear power plant operators are always expected to err on the side of caution. But this is a case where an emergency declaration could have been made prematurely, triggering unnecessary responses,” Acting NRC Region I Administrator David Lew said. “While Exelon, to its credit, identified and fixed the incorrect thresholds, it nevertheless allowed their introduction, and they remained in place for about five months.”

Prior to making a final enforcement decision, the NRC offered the company the opportunity to accept the finding without any formal response or provide additional information in a Regulatory Conference or in writing. The company submitted a written response dated Sept. 4, 2014, in which it stated that it agreed that a performance deficiency occurred but, in its view, it should have been classified as green, or of very low safety significance. Exelon argued, among other things, that there was less significance relative to declaring an emergency prematurely than missing or delaying such decisions and not evacuating the public in a timely manner.

The NRC reviewed the company's response and concluded no new information was presented that would warrant changing the agency's determination that the finding should be classified as white.

As a result of the finalization of the finding as white, Calvert Cliffs Unit 2 will move from the Licensee Response column of the NRC's [Action Matrix](#) to the Regulatory Response column, and therefore be subject to additional agency oversight.