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NRC Will Continue Increased Oversight of Monticello Nuclear Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has decided that despite another inspection finding at the Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant, recent performance improvements make it unnecessary to put the facility in the category of plants with multiple and systemic performance issues. However, the plant will be under increased NRC oversight.

The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear plant performance. The colors go from “green” to “white,” “yellow,” and “red,” commensurate with the safety significance of the issue. Performance indicators are statistical measurements of plant and equipment performance. The NRC’s action matrix reflects overall plant performance and agency response. There are five columns in the matrix with Column 1 requiring a baseline level of inspections. A move to another column results in an increased level of NRC oversight and inspections. If the NRC loses confidence in the plant’s ability to perform safely, the plant will shut down and move to column 5.

Monticello has been in Column 3 of the performance matrix since 2013 due to a [yellow finding](#) related to weaknesses in the external flooding strategy. The results of two recent inspections demonstrated that the plant has taken effective actions to resolve the issues that led to the violation. The results of the [inspection](#), which focused on the flooding issue, indicated a reversal in negative trends that led to the violation. The other [inspection](#), which assessed the plant’s ability to identify and resolve problems, also showed improvement in the plant’s performance.

On Feb. 26, the NRC issued Monticello a greater than green [security finding](#) identified in the fourth quarter of 2014. While the details of this issue are not publicly available, it is important to note that the plant has corrected the situation. By the NRC’s normal process, this finding, aggregated with the yellow finding, would result in Monticello’s placement in Column 4 in the fourth quarter of last year.

NRC will deviate from its normal process and place Monticello in Column 2 of the performance action matrix based on the fact that the flooding issue has been resolved; there have been no recent indications of new significant problems; and improvements in performance. The greater than green security finding warrants a follow-up inspection, which will take place after the plant has had the opportunity to address the issues that caused the incident. In addition, the NRC will also perform an inspection focused on persistent human performance concerns at the plant.

“Plants in Column 4 tend to have broad and systematic performance issues across multiple areas of plant operation. Our recent inspections demonstrate that Monticello’s performance does not warrant its placement in Column 4,” said NRC Region III Administrator Cynthia D. Pederson. “However, we will make sure the plant can sustain the improvements made so far and has resolved the security finding.”

Monticello, operated by Northern States Power Company – Minnesota is located in Monticello, Minn., 30 miles northwest of Minneapolis.

The NRC's [assessment letter and deviation memo](#) are publicly available on the [NRC website](#).