



NRC NEWS

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NRC TO CONDUCT SPECIAL INSPECTION AT HUMBOLDT BAY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will conduct a special inspection into the missing fuel rod segments at the Humboldt Bay nuclear plant, near Eureka, Calif. Pacific Gas & Electric Co., owns the plant, which was permanently shut down in 1976.

PG&E officials notified the NRC on Aug. 17 that they were unable to locate three 18-inch sections of a spent fuel rod that records show was removed from the reactor in 1968. The utility is searching the less accessible areas of the spent fuel pool, reviewing documents and interviewing former plant workers in an effort to locate the missing fuel rod segments, an effort that could continue past the end of the year. It is considered highly unlikely that the material is in an area to which the public would have access, and is most likely either in the spent fuel pool or has been sent to a licensed disposal facility.

The NRC staff has decided to conduct a special inspection because of the scope and complexity of the utility's investigation, the need to evaluate PG&E's radioactive materials accountability and control program and to identify any potential generic implications.

"As stated at our Sept. 29 public meeting with PG&E, utilities are responsible for maintaining strict control and accountability of radioactive materials, and we plan a thorough review of their response to this incident and the quality of their programs," NRC Region IV Administrator Bruce S. Mallett said.

The NRC has had an inspector on site observing utility activities at various times during July, August and September. The results of those inspections will be described in a report expected to be issued within the next two weeks.

The Special Inspection Team will continue this focused NRC oversight with one Region IV employee and two specialists from NRC Headquarters. The team will arrive on site this weekend and begin its inspection on Nov. 1. Team members will visit the site periodically during the next several months. NRC plans to complete the Special Inspection by January.

The team is expected to issue a report within 45 days of completing its inspection. A copy of the charter authorizing the Special Inspection is available from the NRC Public Document Room by calling 1-800-397-4209.

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