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NRC to Perform Wide-Ranging Team Inspection at Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant; Review Supports Agency's Increased Oversight

An NRC multi-disciplinary team of about 20 will begin a three-week, top-to-bottom review on Monday, Nov. 28, at the Pilgrim nuclear power plant. The review – a key element of increased NRC oversight of the plant triggered by earlier performance deficiencies – will involve inspectors with extensive expertise in areas that include human performance, equipment reliability and safety culture, which enables employees to freely and openly raise safety concerns.

This will be the third and largest NRC team inspection conducted as part of the agency's heightened scrutiny initiated in September 2015 at Pilgrim, located in Plymouth, Mass., and owned and operated by Entergy.

The team will evaluate the company's efforts to address the underlying issues that have affected the plant's safety performance. Among the areas the Phase C team will concentrate on will be the quality of the plant's procedures and its corrective action program, which is used to fix problems that arise at the facility on a prioritized basis.

Entergy notified the NRC of its readiness for the inspection in a letter dated Sept. 2, 2016. Plans call for the NRC team to be on-site for the next two weeks, with an expected return in January for the third and final week. Team members will also have the ability to gather needed follow-up information while away from the plant.

“This inspection represents the most comprehensive element of our increased scrutiny at the Pilgrim nuclear power plant,” said NRC Region I Administrator Dan Dorman. “Our team will work hard to closely examine the adequacy of the plant's recovery plans, as well as actions that Entergy has taken to address safety performance issues at the facility. Just as importantly, the inspectors will assess whether those activities have yielded tangible and lasting improvements.”

In September 2015, Pilgrim began receiving heightened NRC oversight following a change in its position (to Column 4) on the NRC's [Action Matrix](#), which dictates the agency's level of oversight at plants. This occurred after inspection findings and performance indicators used by the NRC to gauge the plant's safety performance transitioned from green to white. (Under the NRC's Reactor Oversight Process, color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators are used to assess plant performance. The colors range from green, connoting very low safety or security significance, to white, yellow or red, for an issue of high significance.)

Specifically, on Sept. 2, 2015, the NRC finalized a white (low to moderate safety significance) inspection finding for the plant, stemming from a winter storm-induced shutdown in January 2015 and involving the facility's safety relief valves. As a result of this action, in combination with two earlier white performance indicators for the plant, Pilgrim moved to the Repetitive Degraded Cornerstone, or Column 4, of the agency's Action Matrix.

The NRC's higher level of scrutiny has already entailed two team inspections at Pilgrim. The Phase A inspection took place in January and examined various aspects of the plant's corrective action program. The NRC [report](#) on that review identified one green finding (indicating very low safety significance) involving a failure to adequately correct water leakage from the core spray system. The Phase B inspection carried out in April focused on the effectiveness of the corrective action program during the time the plant has been under increased oversight. The [report](#) on that inspection identified one green violation, involving the inadequate implementation of a corrective action to revise a maintenance procedure. It also discussed issues that had not been properly closed out.

As was the case with the first two reviews, the results of the Phase C inspection will be documented in a report due to be released within 45 days following the formal conclusion of the inspection. The NRC will also issue a Confirmatory Action Letter to Entergy to document its commitments and identify actions it will have to take in order to transition back to normal levels of oversight.

More information on NRC oversight activities at Pilgrim can be found on an NRC [webpage](#) devoted to the subject.