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NRC Issues TVA Confirmatory Order to Address Safety Conscious Work Environment Issues

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a [confirmatory order](#) to the Tennessee Valley Authority, which has agreed to an extensive list of corrective actions to address safety conscious work environment issues.

An NRC inspection last fall at the TVA Watts Bar nuclear plant near Spring City, Tenn., found that, from November 2014 to August 2016, the utility failed to properly implement a process to ensure that adverse employment actions at the plant complied with employee protection regulations and that the actions would not negatively impact the safety conscious work environment. The NRC determined that TVA's failure was a violation of a previous confirmatory order issued in 2009 on similar issues.

The order issued to TVA stems from a settlement achieved under the NRC Alternative Dispute Resolution process, which was initiated at the request of TVA. The NRC ADR process is facilitated by a neutral third party with no decision-making authority who assists the NRC and the licensee in reaching an agreement when there are differences regarding an enforcement action.

A mediation session between NRC staff and TVA was held on June 9, where a settlement was reached. The NRC and TVA agreed that the matter was a significant violation of regulatory requirements but no violation or civil penalty would be issued because of the detailed corrective actions and enhancements required by the confirmatory order.

The order outlines the corrective actions and steps TVA has already taken and agreed to take going forward. Although the issues were identified at the Watts Bar plant, TVA has also agreed to implement actions at its Browns Ferry and Sequoyah nuclear plants, as well as at its corporate offices.

"The ability to raise safety issues without fear of reprisal is very important to ensuring the safety of any plant," said NRC Region II Administrator Cathy Haney. "We were disappointed that the 2009 order had not been followed completely but we believe this new order gives TVA a well-defined path to ensuring the existence of a safety conscious work environment at all its nuclear sites."

Among the steps already taken are an analysis of the causes of the violation and inserting specific corrective actions from that analysis into TVA's corrective action program. TVA has also initiated direct communications to employees and contractors about work environment requirements, established an executive review process to ensure personnel actions do not constitute retaliation, and hired advisors and consultants to focus on safety culture.

Additional actions planned by TVA under the order include: more communications, such as a video briefing for all employees and contractors who perform NRC-regulated activities and an all-hands meeting at every site; further training on NRC employee protection, nuclear safety culture and work environment policies; changes in work processes to ensure a safety conscious work environment is established and maintained; and independent audits and assessments to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the actions. Many of the corrective actions in the order also have specific completion dates and require periodic reports to the NRC.