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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20465-0001

February 10, 1995

MEMORANDUM TO: The Chairman
Commissioner Rogers
Commissioner de Planque

FROM: James M. Taylor *[Signature]*
Executive Director for Operations

SUBJECT: RESTART OF THE COOPER NUCLEAR STATION

This memorandum is to inform the Commission of the status of the restart of the Cooper Nuclear Station (CMS) and the related staff actions.

Background

The Cooper plant was shut down by the licensee on May 25, 1994, as a result of the discovery of significant problems with the electrical distribution system, the control room emergency filtration system, and containment integrity. Additional weaknesses were identified in the areas of surveillance testing, review of industry operating experience, and the performance of the station operations review committee (SORC). These issues were the subjects of two confirmatory action letters (CALs): CAL 4-94-06, dated May 27, 1994, and Revisions 1 and 2, dated June 16 and July 1, 1994; and CAL 4-94-08, dated August 2, 1994. The SORC performance issues were addressed in a letter from the Regional Administrator of Region IV to the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), dated August 25, 1994. The CALs and the letter of August 25, 1994, documented the NRC staff's understanding that the identified issues would be satisfactorily resolved by the licensee before plant restart.

In a letter to NPPD dated June 21, 1994, following the June 1994 Senior Management Meeting, the Executive Director for Operations expressed continuing concern regarding the observed negative trends in performance at the Cooper plant, as underscored by the problems associated with the shutdown of May 25, 1994. As a result of these concerns, senior NRC management determined that additional insight into the performance of CNS management and staff was needed. At the same time, the licensee indicated its intention to sponsor a third-party diagnostic self-assessment (DSA) based on NRC diagnostic evaluation principles. This decision by the licensee allowed the NRC to build upon the DSA process with a Special Evaluation Team (SET) inspection, rather than the more traditional Diagnostic Evaluation Team inspection. The DSA, conducted from July 25 through August 19, 1994, attributed the significant performance deficiencies of the Cooper plant to (1) management's failure to foster high standards for the workforce; (2) weaknesses in long-range planning; (3) ineffectively oversight by management and quality assurance staff;

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and (4) deficiencies in the testing, configuration control, and corrective action programs. The NRC SET assessment, conducted from August 15 through October 7, 1994, found that the DSA was an effective and comprehensive assessment and that the DSA findings closely paralleled the independent findings of the SET. The SET concluded that (1) the licensee's management did not provide adequate leadership or direction; (2) major programs and processes were poorly defined; and (3) independent oversight and self-assessment were not effective in detecting deficiencies, nor in ensuring adequate corrective action.

Discussion

Because of the nature and extent of the managerial and programmatic weaknesses observed at the Cooper plant, as confirmed by the DSA and the SET, the NRC staff initiated a formal process for the review of plant readiness for restart in accordance with NRC Manual Chapter 0350, "Staff Guidelines for Restart Approval." The Cooper Restart Panel was formally established on November 10, 1994, and developed the "Cooper Nuclear Station Restart Action Plan," which specified the issues that the licensee must adequately address before restart of the facility.

The panel held several internal meetings to develop the Restart Action Plan, which identified 13 major issues to be addressed by the licensee. In reviewing the licensee's extensive three-phase performance improvement program (PIP), the panel determined that the 13 issues of the Restart Action Plan were included in the licensee's own restart list of 35 issues and that the PIP provided an acceptable process for addressing the restart issues. To ensure that the licensee adequately implemented its PIP, the panel identified areas in which NRC inspection and technical review were needed. The panel subsequently considered the results of these inspections and reviews.

The panel determined that the licensee had successfully completed the first phase (restart) of the PIP, which addressed the CAL issues, as well as the fundamental managerial weaknesses identified by both the DSA and the SET. The restart panel reviewed extensive inspection data collected over several months, including the findings of an NRC restart team inspection conducted from January 16 to 27, 1995. In addition, the panel held five public meetings with the licensee at the site, from November 8, 1994, through February 2, 1995, to review the progress made in implementing the PIP. On February 2, 1995, the restart panel recommended that NRC management grant approval for the restart of Cooper Nuclear Station. On February 6, 1995, the Regional Administrator of Region IV, after consultation with the Office of the EDO and NRR, granted NRC approval for plant restart.

The licensee began startup and power ascension on February 9, 1995. An interim restart organization has been formed, including a dedicated Restart Manager, 24-hour site management coverage, an augmented operating crew on shift and a continuously staffed, dedicated work control center. The power ascension plan calls for hold points at 50-percent and 90-percent power, and includes a contingency shutdown from 30-percent power for corrective maintenance, if necessary. The licensee plans to reach 100-percent power in approximately 3 weeks.

During plant startup and power ascension, the MRC resident inspection staff will be augmented to provide close oversight of surveillance testing and maintenance, two areas of weakness that led to the extended plant shutdown. In addition, operations will be closely monitored. Twenty-four-hour NRC staff coverage was implemented on February 6, 1995, and will continue through March 5, 1995, as currently planned. The Cooper Restart Panel will continue to oversee the licensee's performance throughout startup and power ascension.

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