



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

REGION III  
801 WARRENVILLE ROAD  
LISLE, ILLINOIS 60532-4351

May 1, 1998

*Purvis*

Mr. M. Wadley  
Vice President  
Nuclear Generation  
Northern States Power Company  
414 Nicollet Mall  
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Dear Mr. Wadley:

Enclosed for your review is the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) 13 report for the Prairie Island Nuclear Generating Plant covering the period February 18, 1996, through March 28, 1998. This report will be discussed with you at a public meeting to be held at the Prairie Island Training Center at 9:00 a.m. (CDT) on May 12, 1998. During this meeting, you are encouraged to candidly discuss any comments you may have regarding our report.

In accordance with Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) policy, I have reviewed the recommendations resulting from the SALP Board assessment. The functional areas of Plant Operations and Engineering are rated Category 2. The functional areas of Maintenance and Plant Support are rated Category 1. It is my view that these ratings reflect current overall strong performance at the Prairie Island Nuclear Generating Plant.

Performance in the area of Plant Operations declined from the previous superior rating, but was good overall. Operator response to off-normal conditions remained strong and operators made conservative operability decisions throughout the assessment period. However, procedural adherence errors and the quality of operating procedures became a concern to the NRC midway through the assessment period. Following the issuance of several violations and the conduct of two NRC management meetings with your staff, the NRC noted improvements in this area. For example, during the last six months, few operator errors occurred and staff were observed stopping work and addressing deficient procedures prior to use. In addition, your staff's ongoing effort to systematically review and update plant procedures as needed is a positive initiative to resolve this important issue. Although management identified the root causes for this performance decline and has taken recent action that improved performance, that improvement has only recently occurred, and many of the actions were taken only after the NRC's direct involvement. Self-assessments in this area were weak and failed to identify the performance issues before events or third parties identified the problems.

Performance in the area of Maintenance continued to be excellent. Strong management and system engineering support, combined with effective work control and an experienced work force, resulted in excellent material condition of plant systems and components, high safety system reliability and availability, and a very small backlog of work activities. Performance of refueling outage activities and maintenance activities during the unscheduled outage to remove a leaking partial-length control rod drive mechanism was especially strong with no challenges to shutdown safety and no significant errors.

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Performance in the area of Engineering improved and was considered very good overall. Engineering staff provided strong support to operations, maintenance, and other organizations, and continued to identify and address technical issues. Of particular note, system engineers continued to effectively manage plant systems and contributed to excellent equipment performance. Several deficiencies were identified in operations, maintenance, and test procedures due to insufficient engineering support. The overall quality of safety evaluations, a problem identified during the previous assessment period, has improved.

Performance in the area of Plant Support continued to be excellent. Radiation protection, chemistry, security, and emergency preparedness programs were strong and fire protection performance was generally good. Several strengths were noted with the number of fire protection impairments requiring a fire watch, maintenance of fire protection equipment, and control of combustibles; however, several problems were identified in the fire protection program area, including fire brigade member training and qualification, timeliness of reviews for hot shorts, and emergency lighting.

In most areas, your staff effectively conducted and used self-assessments. Self-assessment efforts in the areas of maintenance, engineering, and plant support were strong. As noted above, assessments in operations, however, were not as strong or proactive. Self-disclosing events and NRC involvement were needed before self-assessment activities in the operations area became a factor in improving performance. Once management was fully focused on problems in that area, in-depth assessments were conducted and meaningful recommendations were provided and implemented to address the problems identified. Some issues identified during previous assessment periods were not fully resolved until NRC involvement during this period.

Should you have any questions concerning the SALP report, we would be pleased to discuss them with you. While no written response is required, you may provide written comments within 30 days of the SALP meeting.

In accordance with Section 2.790 of NRC's "Rules of Practice," Part 2, Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations, a copy of this letter, the SALP report, and your comments, if any, will be placed in the NRC's Public Document Room.

Sincerely,

/s/A. Bill Beach

A. Bill Beach  
Regional Administrator

Docket Nos.: 50-282; 50-306

Enclosure: SALP 13 Report  
No. 50-282/98001; 50-306/98001

See Attached Distribution

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