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NRC Launches Special Inspection at Watts Bar Nuclear Power Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has launched a special inspection into the circumstances surrounding voids in the residual heat removal system, which made it inoperable for a time on both Unit 1 and Unit 2 at the Watts Bar nuclear plant.

The plant, operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority, is located near Spring City, Tenn., about 60 miles southwest of Knoxville.

The residual heat removal system is used to complete the plant's cooldown process at lower pressures and also provides important functions during certain accident scenarios. On April 19, TVA informed the NRC that calculation revisions had reduced the acceptable size of a void due to gases in the system. On April 21, the accumulated gas in the Unit 1 system was found to have exceeded the acceptable value, and on April 22, the same observation was made on Unit 2.

The NRC inspectors will review the sequence of events, drawings, calculations and acceptance criteria, walk down portions of the plant's systems, evaluate TVA's response and assess the adequacy of actions to address the causes of the issues.

The onsite portion of the inspection is expected to take several days. A report documenting the results of the inspection should be issued within 45 days of the completion of the inspection.