NRC NEWS

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NRC CITES POINT BEACH NUCLEAR PLANT FOR VIOLATION OF "HIGH IMPORTANCE TO SAFETY"

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has determined that a potential failure in an auxiliary cooling system at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station, discovered in November of last year, is an issue of "high importance to safety" that would normally lead to additional NRC inspections. The two-reactor plant, operated by Nuclear Management Company, is located near Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

(Note: The NRC's preliminary evaluation that this situation was of "high importance to safety" was announced in News Release No. III-02-017, issued April 8.)

NRC inspectors found that the auxiliary cooling water system might fail to function under certain abnormal conditions. Normal plant operations were not affected by the problem, which was initially discovered by plant personnel.

The utility took prompt corrective actions to revise procedures and train reactor operators to address the immediate safety concerns. The auxiliary feedwater system was subsequently modified to further correct the problem.

After evaluating the inspection findings and an April 29 meeting with utility representatives, the NRC staff issued its final determination that the potential failure was a "red finding," meaning it is of high importance to safety. If the utility disagrees with the "red" classification, it may appeal the decision.

NRC inspection findings are evaluated using a four-level scale of increasing safety significance, ranging from "green" for a finding of minor significance, through "white" and "yellow" to "red."

In addition to the "red" designation, the NRC issued a Notice of Violation to Nuclear Management Co. for inadequate operating procedures for the auxiliary feedwater system and for failing to identify and correct the problem in prior opportunities between 1997 and 2001.

During the April 29 meeting, the utility proposed that the finding be treated as an old design issue. As a result, the NRC will conduct additional inspections to determine if the potential failure in the auxiliary feedwater system should be considered an old design issue and to review the corrective actions taken by the utility.

Under the NRC's Reactor Oversight Process, a "red finding" would normally lead to an extensive inspection program to broadly assess the utility's management of issues and its corrective action program.

If, however, the issue is determined to be an old design issue, the agency's inspection followup would be more limited, focusing on the response to the auxiliary cooling system problem. The decision on the appropriate inspection level will be made after the supplemental inspection to be conducted in the next several months.

The details of the NRC inspection findings are discussed in Inspection Report 2001-17 which is available online in the NRC's electronic reading room. This report -- with the accession number ML020950889 -- may be viewed in the NRC's ADAMS document system, accessible at http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html. Help in using ADAMS is available by contacting the NRC Public Document Room at 301/415-4737 or 1/800/397-4209.

The final determination of the safety significance will be posted on the NRC's web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/POIN1/poin1_chart.html

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