

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs, Region II
61 Forsyth Street, Suite 23T85, Atlanta, GA 30303
Tel. 404-562-4416 or 4417 Fax 404-562-4980
Internet: kmc2@nrc.gov or rdh1@nrc.gov

No: II-99-27
Contact: Ken Clark or Roger Hannah

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NRC FINDS PERFORMANCE ACCEPTABLE, AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT IN LATEST REVIEW OF OCONEE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has found that safety performance remains acceptable, with some areas needing improvement, in the NRC's latest plant performance review at the Oconee nuclear power plant, operated by Duke Power near Seneca, South Carolina.

In a letter to the company which outlined results of the review, Charles A. Casto, deputy director of the Division of Reactor Projects in the NRC's Region II office in Atlanta, said "overall performance at Oconee was acceptable" during the period of evaluation from April 1998 through January 1999. He said that, while operations performance remained acceptable, it declined as the result of several "operator-related, human performance shortcomings" and the "inadequacy of instructions supporting emergency operating procedures."

He said maintenance performance improved and that, while engineering performance showed some improvement, performance in the area of design control continued to be poor as shown by a number of variances from requirements. He said performance in the area of plant support continued to be "consistent."

Casto said that the NRC resident inspectors at Oconee will "focus on human performance" in operations during the course of normal inspections over the next evaluation period and that their efforts will be supplemented in the maintenance area by regional inspectors following up on previous steam generator issues. He said normal inspection efforts in the engineering area at Oconee will be supplemented by additional reviews of emergency operating procedures, follow-up inspections of the plant's standby shutdown facility, review of emergency feedwater system open items and an assessment of the company's review of the plant's Updated Final Safety Analysis Report. Normal inspection efforts in the area of plant support will be enhanced by inspections to review the status of the plant's fire barrier penetration seals and license renewal issues.

The text of the plant performance review letter is available from the NRC Region II Office of Public Affairs and on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/ppr>.

NRC reviews safety performance twice a year at every licensed nuclear power plant in the nation. These reviews give the agency staff an integrated assessment of plant performance and provide a basis for planning inspection activities.

Plant performance reviews are being used by the NRC as an interim measure to monitor nuclear power plant safety. The agency began using it for this purpose after suspending the Systematic Assessment of License Performance (SALP) process until a new assessment program

is developed. Previously, SALP reports were issued every 12 to 24 months.

The new reactor oversight and assessment program being developed will provide quarterly performance reports, based on a number of performance indicators and on inspection findings. This program will be tested at eight sites beginning in June and will be extended to all plants next January. A full description of the new program is available on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm>.

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