



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region III

801 Warrenville Road

Lisle, IL 60532

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. III-03-079

December 16, 2003

CONTACT: Jan Strasma (630) 829-9663

E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

Viktorija Mitlyng (630) 829-9662

NRC ISSUES FINAL SIGNIFICANCE DETERMINATION OF "RED" FOR AUXILIARY FEEDWATER SYSTEM PROBLEM AT POINT BEACH

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has concluded that the potential failure of the auxiliary feedwater pumps discovered last year at the Point Beach Nuclear Plant was of "high safety significance." The facility, located near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, is operated by Nuclear Management Company.

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

NRC inspectors concluded that the significance of the pump problem was "red" for Unit 2 and "yellow" for Unit 1. The difference in the safety significance determination results from the fact that the problem existed longer at Unit 2 than at Unit 1.

The NRC's preliminary assessment was issued on April 2 (Refer to NRC press release dated April 4).

NRC inspectors determined that the auxiliary feedwater system might fail to function under certain abnormal conditions because recirculation lines could become plugged by debris typically found in the plant's service water system, which is the backup to the normal supply of water.

The auxiliary feedwater system is used to safely cool the reactor if problems occur during plant operations and to continue removing heat from the reactor after shutdown.

Normal plant operations were not affected by the problem which was discovered by the utility in October of last year. The utility took action to revise procedures and train reactor operators to address the immediate safety concerns and subsequently modified the auxiliary feedwater system to further correct the problem.

This finding is related to an earlier "red" finding associated with a problem with valves on the auxiliary feedwater system recirculation lines identified by plant personnel in 2001. The NRC determined that if these valves failed to function because of equipment damage, the protective

recirculation flow required to support the operation of the auxiliary feedwater pumps would stop and result in pump damage.

The two "red" findings are related in that they both affect the auxiliary feedwater recirculation system. However, they were treated separately because they occurred at different points in time.

The NRC recently completed a special in-depth inspection which resulted from the original "red" finding at the Point Beach Nuclear Plant. This inspection, tasked with taking a comprehensive look at principal aspects of plant operations to identify other possible performance problems, examined the adequacy of the utility's investigation and the corrective actions to address both feedwater pump issues. The results of the special inspection will be discussed at a public meeting on December 16 (Please refer to NRC press release dated December 9 for details of the meeting). The NRC staff plans to conduct further inspections at the plant next year to make sure improvements in plant performance take place and are sustained.

The results of the special inspection will be publicly available from the Region III Office of Public Affairs and on the NRC's web site: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>. Assistance in using the web reading room is available by calling the NRC Public Document Room at 800-397-4209.

Nuclear Management Company has 30 days to contest the significance determination.

###