



NRC NEWS

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NRC FINALIZES 'WHITE' FINDING FOR VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR PLANT OVER TONE ALERT RADIOS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has finalized a “white” inspection finding for the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant because a portion of the facility’s emergency notification system – namely tone alert radios – was degraded. Under the NRC’s Reactor Oversight Process, such a finding represents an issue of low to moderate safety significance and will most likely result in additional inspections by the agency.

The NRC uses a color-coded system to categorize inspection findings. It ranges from “green,” for a very low safety issue, to “red,” for a high safety issue.

During a review at the Entergy-operated plant in Vernon, Vt., that began on July 26, an NRC inspector determined that Vermont Yankee did not have the means to ensure early notification of an emergency to a portion of the population within the plant’s 10-mile-radius Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ), as required by the facility’s emergency plan. Specifically, it was determined that Entergy could not ensure that there was proper distribution and maintenance of tone alert radios that would be used to alert individuals in portions of the EPZ who would not hear sirens due to the terrain.

On Nov. 12, Entergy was notified that the finding had been preliminarily classified as “white” and was offered an opportunity to request a regulatory conference to discuss the matter or to explain its position in writing. Entergy opted to provide a written reply, which was submitted on Dec. 15. In the response, Entergy acknowledged that sirens and tone alert radios are the two primary means it uses to notify those living within the EPZ of an emergency. It also concurred with the NRC’s assessment that Vermont Yankee did not provide adequate and active measures to ensure proper distribution of the tone alert radios. However, the company also stated its belief that the safety significance of the condition was substantially mitigated by the fact that there are other means of notification available, including radio and TV broadcasts, the use of automatic telephone dialing/notification systems, pagers and cell phones.

“The NRC recognizes that some of the individuals who were not issued tone alert radios may be notified via other various informal and unplanned methods,” NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins wrote in a letter to Entergy regarding the finalized enforcement action. “However, as described

in your response dated December 15, 2004, you do not take credit for these other methods of notification in your Alert and Notification System design. Therefore, the NRC cannot assume that these methods would be successful.”

Entergy has implemented appropriate compensatory measures and therefore the finding does not present an immediate safety concern. In addition, it is continuing with long-term corrective measures.

The company has 30 days to respond to the finalized inspection finding.

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