



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. I-10-030

June 15, 2010

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NRC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETING ON JUNE 22 TO DISCUSS ANNUAL ASSESSMENT FOR VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold a public meeting on Tuesday, June 22, regarding the agency's annual assessment of safety performance for the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant during 2009. At the meeting, in addition to reviewing the results of the plant's performance, the NRC staff will discuss work being done by the agency's Groundwater Contamination Task Force and inspections associated with a Demand for Information (DFI) issued in March to Entergy regarding Vermont Yankee.

Vermont Yankee is the site of a single boiling-water reactor. It is located in Vernon, Vt., and is operated by Entergy Nuclear.

The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the auditorium at Brattleboro Union High School, at 131 Fairground Road in Brattleboro, Vt. There will be brief presentations on the 2009 annual assessment of performance, the work of the groundwater task force and the DFI, followed by an opportunity for attendees to ask questions regarding these topics. Attendees will also be able to ask questions of the NRC staff about the plant's performance and the agency's oversight of the facility prior to the session's adjournment.

In conjunction with the meeting, NRC staff will conduct an informational open house for interested members of the public. That session, which will run from 4 to 6 p.m. in the foyer at the same location, will allow those in attendance to discuss plant-related topics on a one-on-one basis with NRC staff, as well as receive information on agency activities via poster boards.

The NRC utilizes a combination of color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to gauge plant performance. The colors start with "green," representing very low safety significance, and increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the significance of the issues involved.

Overall, Vermont Yankee operated safely during 2009. At the conclusion of last year, there were no performance indicators for Vermont Yankee that were other than "green" and no inspection findings that were "greater than green," which would normally result in a plant continuing to receive the NRC's baseline, or routine, level of oversight.

However, the NRC announced on April 7 that it planned to conduct additional inspections at the plant to oversee Entergy's efforts to address groundwater contamination at the site, and to review and assess the company's response to the DFI. To provide additional oversight, the NRC can, when warranted, deviate from the normal Reactor Oversight Process, with those plans spelled out in a "Deviation Memo," which must be approved by the agency's Executive Director for Operations. Such a memo was issued for Vermont Yankee in early April.

In January, Entergy notified the NRC that it had received positive sample results for tritium from a groundwater well at Vermont Yankee. The NRC's Resident Inspectors at the plant and regional specialists have continued to provide oversight of the company's actions in response to that development through direct observations and independent assessments. The tritium contamination does not pose any health or safety concerns for members of the public or plant workers.

On March 1, the NRC issued a DFI requiring confirmation by Entergy that information provided to the NRC which is material to NRC decisions is accurate and that the impact of personnel changes is assessed in terms of regulatory performance and safety culture. The DFI stemmed from an Entergy decision to take action against certain employees at Vermont Yankee as a result of the company's independent internal investigation into alleged contradictory or misleading information provided to the State of Vermont and then not corrected.

In 2009, the NRC devoted 6,176 hours to inspection of Vermont Yankee, including four inspections conducted by specialists from the agency's regional office. A typical one-unit site received 5,793 hours of inspection last year.

"In light of groundwater contamination issues and our reviews associated with the Demand for Information, the NRC will devote additional resources to Vermont Yankee to ensure these areas receive the scrutiny they deserve," NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins said. "We expect Entergy to continue to take all reasonable steps to prevent the recurrence of any radioactive leakage from the plant."

In addition to issuing inspection reports, the agency issues its review of performance at specific plants twice a year. Inspection findings and performance indicators are also updated on the NRC's web site, www.nrc.gov, each quarter. Following the release of the annual performance reviews every March, the NRC meets with the public in the vicinity of each facility to discuss the results. The meetings are in keeping with the agency's commitment to transparency with regard to its activities.

The annual assessment letter for the Vermont Yankee plant is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/vy_2009q4.pdf. The notice for the open house is available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) under accession number ML101540331. ADAMS is available at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in using ADAMS can be obtained via the NRC's Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737, or by e-mail at PDR.Resources@NRC.GOV.

Routine inspections are carried out by two NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the agency's Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa. Among the areas at Vermont Yankee to be inspected this year by NRC specialists are radiation protection, emergency preparedness, fire protection and the dry cask storage of spent nuclear fuel. In addition, there will be further inspection conducted related to the groundwater contamination issue.

Current performance information for Vermont Yankee is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/VY/vy_chart.html.

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