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NRC Schedules Public Meeting July 11 to Discuss Performance of Prairie Island Nuclear Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will hold a public meeting July 11 to discuss the agency's annual safety assessment of the Prairie Island nuclear power plant. The two-unit plant is operated by Northern States Power Co.-Minnesota., and is located in Welch, Minn., about 28 miles southeast of Minneapolis.

The public meeting is scheduled for 7-9 p.m. at the Red Wing Public Library, Foot Room, 225 East Ave., in Red Wing. The NRC staff will present the results of the plant's 2012 annual assessment, talk about the NRC and its range of activities and be available to respond to questions and comments from the public.

“When the NRC evaluates Prairie Island's performance for the previous year, we take a look at any and all issues that might be of concern,” said Region III Administrator Charles Casto. “Then we map out our inspection plans for that specific facility, issue inspection reports, and hold public meetings near the plant in order to discuss our oversight and answer questions from local residents.”

The NRC review concluded that Prairie Island Units 1 and 2 operated safely in 2012.

The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear plant performance. The colors start with green and then increase to white, yellow, or red, commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved. Performance indicators are statistical measurements of plant and equipment performance.

All performance indicators for Unit 1 during 2012 were determined to be green. Unit 1 had one white inspection finding of low-to-moderate safety significance. The finding involved the failure of the plant to maintain an effective emergency plan by not prioritizing the repair of a high range vent gas radiation detector. Unit 2 had no findings but had one white performance indicator in the area of mitigating systems. Mitigating systems are made up of key pieces of equipment and specific systems that must be available and reliable when needed.

The letter also notes that the NRC has identified cross-cutting issues in the area of human performance, specifically conservative decision-making. The issue will remain open until the corrective

actions taken prove to be effective and sustained performance improvement is observed in the human performance area. Cross-cutting issues are issues that affect multiple areas of plant operation.

As a result of this overall performance, the NRC will perform supplemental inspections for both white issues to make sure the plant understands the causes of these deficiencies and has taken effective short- and long-term corrective actions to prevent their recurrence. Routine inspections are performed by two NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the Region III Office in Lisle, Ill., and the agency's headquarters in Rockville, Md. Among the areas of plant operations being inspected this year are radiation protection, emergency preparedness and fire protection.

The annual assessment letter sent from the NRC Region III office to the company addresses the performance of the plant during 2012 and is available on the NRC website.

The most current performance information for Prairie Island Unit 1 and Unit 2 is available on the NRC website.