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NRC Increases Oversight at Oconee Nuclear Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is increasing its oversight of the Oconee nuclear power station after citing the plant for a violation related to the plant's failure to identify and correct a crack in a weld on a key safety system.

The Oconee plant is operated by Duke Energy near Seneca, S.C., about 30 miles west of Greenville.

The NRC staff held a conference with Duke Energy officials on July 31 to discuss the risk significance of a violation linked to plant staff's failure to identify and correct a crack in a weld located in the Unit 1 high pressure injection system. The violation, identified during an NRC inspection in June, has been determined to be "white," meaning it has low to moderate safety significance.

There was no immediate safety concern because the crack was repaired, but the NRC determined that the method used by the plant to check for cracks did not provide acceptable coverage and did not identify the crack before it began leaking.

The leak led to reactor coolant system pressure boundary leakage and a forced shutdown of Unit 1. The high pressure injection system provides water to help cool the reactor core during an accident if pressure in the system had remained high.

The NRC evaluates regulatory performance at commercial nuclear power plants with a color-coded system which classifies findings as green, white, yellow or red, in increasing order of safety significance. The white finding will result in the NRC conducting a supplemental inspection at Oconee. The inspection is designed to provide assurance that the root and contributing causes of risk-significant performance issues are understood in order to prevent recurrence.

"Duke Energy has taken initial corrective actions at the Oconee plant and the supplemental inspection is an important step in helping us ensure the plant continues to operate safely," said Victor McCree, the NRC's Region II administrator.