



**UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
REGION IV
611 RYAN PLAZA DRIVE, SUITE 400
ARLINGTON, TEXAS 76011-8064**

March 31, 2000

Randal K. Edington, Vice President - Operations
River Bend Station
Entergy Operations, Inc.
P.O. Box 220
St. Francisville, Louisiana 70775

SUBJECT: PLANT PERFORMANCE REVIEW - RIVER BEND STATION

Dear Mr. Edington:

The purpose of this letter is to communicate our assessment of your performance and to inform you of our planned inspections at your facility. On March 8, 2000, we completed a Plant Performance Review (PPR) of River Bend Station. We conduct these reviews to develop an integrated overview of the safety performance of each operating nuclear power plant. We use the results of the PPR in planning and allocating inspection resources and as inputs to our senior management meeting (SMM) process. This PPR evaluated inspection results and safety performance information for the one-year period from through February 11, 2000, but emphasized the last 6 months to ensure that our assessment reflected your current performance. Our most recent summary of plant performance at River Bend Station was provided to you in a letter dated March 19, 1999, and was discussed with you in a public meeting on April 20, 1999.

The NRC has been developing a revised reactor oversight process that will replace our existing inspection and assessment processes, including the PPR, the SMM, and the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP). We recently completed a pilot program for the revised reactor oversight process at nine participating sites and are making necessary adjustments based on feedback and lessons learned. We are beginning initial implementation of the revised reactor oversight process industry-wide, including your facility, on April 2, 2000.

This PPR reflects continued process improvements as we make the transition into the revised reactor oversight process. You will notice that the following summary of plant performance is organized differently from our previous performance summaries. Instead of characterizing our assessment results by SALP functional area, we are organizing the results into the strategic performance arenas embodied in the revised reactor oversight process. Additionally, in assessing your performance, we have considered the historical performance indicator data that you submitted in January 2000 in conjunction with the inspection results. The results of this PPR were used to establish the inspection plan in accordance with the new risk-informed inspection program (consisting of baseline and supplemental inspections). Although this letter incorporates some terms and concepts associated with the new oversight process, it does not reflect the much broader changes in inspection and assessment that will be evident after we have fully implemented our revised reactor oversight process.

During the last 6 months, with the exception of one reactor trip and two power reductions for suppression testing, River Bend Station typically operated at or near full power. Although the NRC identified some performance issues during this assessment period, we note that River Bend Station continues to operate in a safe manner.

In the reactor safety strategic arena, performance resulted in safe operation. However, we noted an increase in instances of failure to implement or follow procedures, and problems continued with control and implementation of surveillance testing. Some engineering products lacked rigor and engineering personnel were inconsistent in the timely identification of problems and implementation of corrective actions. The baseline inspection will be adequate to monitor your corrective actions.

We did not identify any significant performance issues in the radiation safety or safeguards strategic arenas. As a result, only baseline inspections are planned. However, we plan to conduct an Operational Safeguards Response Evaluation (OSRE) inspection based upon the amount of time since the last OSRE and the changes that have been made in your security program. We will continue with OSRE inspections until the industry proposed Self-Assessment Program is approved by the NRC staff as an acceptable substitute for the OSRE inspections.

Enclosure 1 contains a historical listing of plant issues, referred to as the Plant Issues Matrix (PIM), that were used during this PPR process to arrive at our integrated view of your performance trends. The PIM for this assessment is grouped by the prior SALP functional areas of operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support, although the future PIM will be organized along the cornerstones of safety as described in the revised reactor oversight process. The enclosed PIM includes items summarized from inspection reports or other docketed correspondence regarding River Bend Station. We did not document all aspects of licensee programs and performance that may be functioning appropriately. Rather, we only documented issues that we believe warrant management attention or represent noteworthy aspects of performance. In addition, the PPR may also have considered some predecisional and draft material that does not appear in the attached PIM, including observations from events and inspections that had occurred since our last inspection report was issued but had not yet received full review and consideration. We will make this material publically available as part of the normal issuance of our inspection reports and other correspondence.

Enclosure 2 lists our planned inspections for the period April 2000 through March 2001 at River Bend Station to allow you to resolve scheduling conflicts and personnel availability in advance of our inspector arrival onsite. The inspection schedule for the latter half of the period is more tentative and may be adjusted in the future due to emerging performance issues at River Bend Station or other Region IV facilities. We also included some NRC noninspection activities in Enclosure 2 for your information. Routine resident inspections are not listed due to their ongoing and continuous nature.

Entergy Operations, Inc.

-3-

We will inform you of any changes to the inspection plan. If you have any questions, please contact me at 817-860-8148.

Sincerely,

/RA/

William D. Johnson, Chief
Project Branch B
Division of Reactor Projects

Docket No.: 50-458
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Enclosures:

1. Plant Issues Matrix
2. Inspection Plan

cc w/enclosures:

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-4-

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-5-

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