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NRC Statement on Sleeping Guards at Nuclear Power Plants

In recent months, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has identified several instances of inattentive security officers at a handful of nuclear power plants. In all cases, we have taken immediate action. The NRC takes security at nuclear power plants very seriously and expects all its licensed facilities to uphold the regulations requiring that security personnel remain alert and available to carry out their responsibilities. Plant operators, licensed by the NRC, are responsible for ensuring the capability and quality of the security force. They must meet the very high standards set by the NRC whether they use their own security force or contract the work to a professional security firm.

It is important to underscore that at no time was security at the power plants in jeopardy and in all cases, the plants have taken extra steps to ensure they are meeting NRC regulations.

So far, the NRC has initiated special inspections, increased random overnight checks, held public meetings and required additional information from all nuclear power plants in order to determine if new regulatory measures are warranted. The NRC is also considering what penalties may be appropriate. In addition, the agency will shortly put in place a regulation that addresses guard fatigue and sets work hour limits to incorporate requirements from an Order NRC issued to plant operators in October 2003.

Well trained, armed and alert security personnel, in concert with such physical measures as barriers, motion detectors, guard towers, and monitors, are an important component of an overall defensive strategy at commercial nuclear power plants that are the most heavily fortified civilian structures in this country. Plant security does not rely on one individual or set of individuals. It relies on layers of protection so that a sleeping guard does not mean an entire plant is at risk.

One situation, which occurred at the Peach Bottom nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania, has been the subject of recent media attention. It's regrettable that information provided to NRC early on was insufficient to validate the sleeping guard assertions at the plant. As soon as NRC officials saw a video (in September) of several sleeping officers, the agency acted immediately.

The NRC will continue to hold its licensed facilities to high standards and will actively pursue any that fall short.