



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. II-12-034

May 14, 2012

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NRC TO INCREASE OVERSIGHT OF ST. LUCIE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is increasing its oversight of Unit 1 at the St. Lucie nuclear power plant as a result of the number and type of unplanned shutdowns the plant has experienced. The St. Lucie plant is located in Jensen Beach, Fla., east of Port St. Lucie, and is operated by FPL.

After its quarterly review of plant performance in April, the NRC updated its assessment of St. Lucie Unit 1. That evaluation consisted of a review of performance indicators and inspection results.

The NRC review found that St. Lucie Unit 1 crossed the green-to-white threshold for Unplanned Scrams per 7,000 Critical Hours performance indicator. This was due to one trip in the third quarter of 2011, one trip in the fourth quarter of 2011, and one trip in the first quarter of 2012. In addition, the review identified that the Unplanned Scrams with Complications performance indicator also crossed the green-to-white threshold. This was due to one complicated trip in the third quarter of 2011 and one complicated trip in the first quarter of 2012.

“Overall, the St. Lucie plant continues to operate safely,” said NRC Region II Administrator Victor McCree. “However, these shutdowns point to performance issues and a trend that needs to be addressed.”

The NRC has placed St. Lucie Unit 1 in the Degraded Cornerstone Column of the Reactor Oversight Process Action Matrix beginning in the first quarter this year. The NRC will conduct a supplemental inspection to provide assurance that the causes of the shutdowns are understood, that the extent of condition is identified, and ensure FPL’s corrective actions are sufficient.”

The NRC evaluates inspection findings and performance indicators at commercial nuclear power plants with a color-coded system which classifies them as green, white, yellow or red, in increasing order of safety significance. As the significance increases, the NRC heightens the level of oversight for that plant. If a plant takes appropriate corrective actions and improves safety performance, the agency returns to its normal, but still extensive, inspection schedule.

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