



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT MONTICELLO NUCLEAR PLANT DUE TO EQUIPMENT PROBLEMS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is conducting a special inspection at the Monticello Nuclear Power Station to review equipment problems associated with an unplanned reactor shutdown. The plant is operated by Xcel Energy and is located in Monticello, Minn.

On Sept. 11, 2008, the Monticello Plant tripped (shut down automatically) as a result of a transformer failure that led to loss of off-site power to some plant equipment. After the trip, the plant experienced other equipment problems involving safety-related systems.

“The plant shut down safely and these equipment problems did not make the plant unstable,” said Regional Administrator James Caldwell. “However, we need to have a more thorough understanding of the scope of equipment issues that occurred. Our special inspection team is tasked with review and analysis of these issues and of the plant’s actions to fix these problems.”

In addition to reviewing the circumstances around the Sept. 11 trip, the special inspection will also evaluate equipment problems that occurred on Sept. 17, when the Monticello Plant declared an Unusual Event, the lowest level of emergency in the NRC’s emergency classification system. The plant was still shut down as a result of the earlier trip.

The NRC’s special inspection team was at the plant when the declaration occurred. The team members assisted the resident inspectors at the plant to respond to the event.

Operators of the Monticello Nuclear Power Station declared an Unusual Event after a contract employee was fatally injured when he came into contact with a high-voltage power line outside of the plant gates. This led to an interruption of power to some plant equipment. The power interruption caused a system designed to cool the reactor while it is shut down to become unavailable. Power to the cooling system was subsequently restored, and there was no hazard to plant workers or the public. The NRC’s special inspection team will review the circumstances around these equipment issues.

The three person special inspection team will establish the sequence of events during the Sept. 11 trip and the Sept. 17 Unusual Event; review the equipment problems associated with both incidents; conduct an independent review of actions and responses of plant operators; and review the utility's response to the situation and the company's corrective actions.

The duration of a special inspection cannot be determined in advance. The average duration of a special inspection is seven days. The inspection report will be issued about 45 days after the inspection is complete. It will be available through the NRC RIII Office of Public Affairs and at the NRC web site: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

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