



NRC NEWS

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2443 Warrenville Road

Lisle IL 60532

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov> E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

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CONTACT: Jan Strasma (630) 829-9663
Viktoria Mitlyng (630) 829-9662

NRC RETURNS POINT BEACH TO ROUTINE OVERSIGHT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has determined that the Point Beach Nuclear Power Plant has taken sufficient corrective actions to allow its return to routine agency oversight by the end of December. The two-reactor plant, operated by Nuclear Management Co., was placed under heightened NRC oversight in early 2003.

Point Beach, located near Two Rivers, Wis., was placed under heightened oversight as a result of three “red” findings, which means they were of high safety significance, and one “yellow” finding, meaning it had moderate to high significance to safety.

All four findings were associated with problems in the auxiliary feedwater system. These problems did not affect normal plant operations but could have diminished the plant’s ability to mitigate the effects of an accident under certain abnormal circumstances.

The auxiliary feedwater system is used to safely cool the reactor if problems occur during plant operations and to continue removing heat from the reactor after shutdown.

The utility took actions to correct problems with the auxiliary feedwater system shortly after discovery.

NRC inspection findings are evaluated using a four-level scale of safety significance, ranging from “green” for a finding of very low significance, through “white” and “yellow” to “red,” for a finding of high safety significance.

When the safety significance of findings increase, the NRC increases its oversight. This results in such actions as more frequent and more in-depth inspections and more frequent public meetings during which plant managers report on the status of corrective actions and answer questions from the NRC.

As a result of increased oversight at Point Beach, the NRC performed a broad, in-depth inspection from July to December 2003. The inspection reviewed the causes of auxiliary feedwater system problems and took a broader look at other areas of plant operation that could be affected by similar causes.

Following the inspection, the utility developed a plan to address the issues identified by the NRC and to improve plant performance. The utility committed to make substantial and sustained improvements in five areas: human performance, engineering design control, engineering/operations interface, emergency preparedness and the corrective action program.

In April 2004, the NRC issued a Confirmatory Action Letter which documented these commitments and the NRC's plans to conduct additional inspections to monitor the utility's progress in accomplishing their stated goals. The letter also stated that Point Beach would remain under increased oversight until the NRC finds "demonstrated improved performance in the five areas listed above."

In early 2006, the NRC concluded that sufficient progress had been made in all areas of commitment but engineering design control. On April 14, 2006, the NRC issued a revised Confirmatory Action Letter documenting these conclusions.

The NRC continued to monitor the plant's performance in engineering design control and is satisfied that corrective actions in this area have demonstrated effectiveness and sustainability.

The plant will return to routine NRC oversight at the end of December 2006.

"Although Point Beach has operated safely, staff and management worked hard over the past three and a half years to improve plant performance," said James Caldwell, the NRC Regional Administrator. "We recognize their efforts and expect the utility not only to sustain the positive changes they had made but also to continue to improve."

All documents related to this issue are available from the Region III Office of Public Affairs or from the agency's online document library at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> .

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