



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT BRAIDWOOD AND BYRON NUCLEAR PLANTS

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has started a Special Inspection to review the handling of two equipment issues at Byron and Braidwood nuclear power stations operated by Exelon Generation Company.

The first issue involves the operability of backup systems that would be used to remove heat from the reactor in case of a reactor trip or an accident at Braidwood and Byron stations. The second issue is associated with the loss of control room equipment alarms during maintenance activities in 2010 and 2011.

Neither of the issues posed an immediate threat to public health and safety. Both equipment issues have been resolved.

Braidwood is located 20 miles southwest of Joliet, Ill.; Byron is located 17 miles southwest of Rockford, Ill.

The first issue came to light in February, when during routine NRC inspections at Byron, NRC inspectors identified a concern with Auxiliary Feedwater (AFW) pumps. As a result, the NRC required Exelon to provide an assessment of this equipment's ability to cool the reactor in case the normal system for heat removal became unavailable at both Byron and Braidwood stations which are similar in design (Exelon's Event Notification to the NRC for Braidwood #46707 at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/2011/20110330en.html#en46707> and #46708 for Byron at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/2011/20110330en.html#en46708>). The company's initial evaluation was that the pumps would be available to perform their safety function. However, after confirmatory calculations were completed, the company concluded that the pumps would not be operable.

AFW pumps are not used in regular plant operation; they are designed to be used as a backup system in case regular reactor cooling equipment is no longer available.

The second issue is associated with the unavailability of control room equipment alarms and the declaration of an Unusual Event (NRC Preliminary Notification III-11-005 at <http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1108/ML110830918.pdf>), the lowest level of emergency in the NRC's emergency classification system, at Braidwood on March 24 of this year. The review of past maintenance activities revealed that plant operators failed to recognize the same conditions while performing similar maintenance activities on Aug. 10, 2010.

The special inspection team will review the circumstances surrounding the AFW system issues identified at Braidwood and Byron, including the original design of the system and the methods utilized by Exelon to arrive at the operability evaluations presented to the NRC. The special inspection team will also review the circumstances surrounding the unavailability of control room equipment alarms at Braidwood, including causes of these events, and an assessment of whether Byron has experienced similar events. The team will also evaluate Exelon's actions to address both issues.

The NRC special inspection report will be available within 45 days of the inspection's completion 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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