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NRC CITES PALISADES FOR THREE VIOLATIONS; PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULED

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued three violations to the Palisades nuclear power plant. One violation is for a “substantial safety significance” issue and two others are for a “low to moderate safety significance” issue. These violations will result in additional NRC inspections and oversight of the facility. The plant is located in Covert, Mich., approximately 50 miles west of Kalamazoo and is operated by Entergy Nuclear Operations.

The NRC will also hold a public meeting Feb. 29, to discuss the plant’s performance. The meeting will run from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. EST at the Beach Haven Event Center, 10420 M-140 in South Haven. The meeting will be open for the public to ask questions of the NRC after the presentation has been made. Additional details about the public meeting will be available soon.

The violation resulting in a substantial significance to safety is related to a Sept. 25 electrical fault caused by personnel at the site which resulted in a reactor trip, the loss of half of the control room indicators, and actuation of safety systems that were not warranted by actual plant conditions. This made the reactor trip more challenging for the operators and increased the possibility of a serious event occurring. The NRC conducted a Special Inspection and determined the plant failed to have adequate work procedures for the electrical panel maintenance work to ensure the job was done successfully.

The violations resulting in a low to moderate significance to safety are related to a coupling failure in the service water system. The system is comprised of three motor driven pumps which provide cooling to safety related equipment such as containment air coolers and diesel generators. Last August one of the service water pumps failed due to cracking in one of the couplings. This was a repeat of a previous equipment failure that occurred in 2009. The NRC conducted a Special Inspection and later concluded the plant failed to prevent recurrence of the cracking condition and failed to completely consider the properties of the steel used in a past modification of the couplings.

After consideration of the information the NRC staff has characterized the Sept. 25 violation as “yellow” or as a finding of substantial significance and the Aug. 9 violations as “white” or having a low to moderate safety significance. The NRC evaluates a nuclear plant’s performance with a color coded process that classifies regulatory findings as green, white, yellow or red, in order of increasing safety significance.

The yellow and white inspection findings will place the plant in the “Degraded Cornerstone Column” of the NRC’s Action Matrix (also known as column 3) as of the fourth quarter of 2011. This move in the action matrix will result not only in additional oversight at Palisades, but will also include a NRC supplemental team inspection to independently determine whether Palisades understands the root cause and contributing causes of the risk significant issues; has identified the extent of the condition and extent of cause; and has taken the appropriate corrective actions to prevent recurrence. In addition, the NRC will evaluate if the site considered whether any safety culture component caused or significantly contributed to the issues.

The NRC’s final significance letter issued to Entergy detailing the findings will be publically available through the [AGENCY DOCUMENTS ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM](#) (ADAMS) website. The number to access the final letter is ML120450037.

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