



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 TERMINATES SPECIAL OVERSIGHT PANEL, BEGINS AUGMENTED REACTOR OVERSIGHT PROGRAM FOR DAVIS-BESSE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has terminated its special Oversight Panel for the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Plant and returned the monitoring of the facility to an expanded version of the agency's Reactor Oversight Process.

The agency established its Davis-Besse Oversight Panel in April 2002 to coordinate the NRC's regulatory activities in response to the corrosion damage to the reactor vessel head and other safety issues at the plant. The panel included NRC managers and staff from the Region III office in Lisle, Ill., NRC Headquarters in Rockville, Md., and the NRC resident inspectors at the plant.

Davis-Besse -- operated by FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company and located near Oak Harbor, Ohio -- resumed operation in March 2004 after being shut down for about two years to address equipment and staff performance problems.

"Since Davis-Besse returned to operation, the plant has operated safely," said James Caldwell, NRC Regional Administrator. "With the record of safe operation at power for more than a year now and their satisfactory completion of the order requiring independent assessments and a successful mid-cycle outage, the NRC can make the transition from a special panel to an augmented oversight program."

The NRC Oversight Panel will meet with FirstEnergy officials on May 24 to discuss the transition. The meeting, which will be open to public observation, will begin at 6 p.m. at the Camp Perry Clubhouse, 1000 Lawrence Road, Bldg. 600, in Port Clinton. At the conclusion of the meeting, before adjournment, the NRC staff will be available for public questions and comments.

The Reactor Oversight Process includes monitoring of plant safety performance with statistical measures called performance indicators and inspections of plant safety performance and activities by NRC resident inspectors and specialists based in the regional office and NRC headquarters.

Although oversight of the plant will be returned to the normal program, it will be substantially expanded to include additional inspections focused on corrective action program implementation and additional requirements imposed on the plant in an NRC Confirmatory Order issued at the time of startup.

The Confirmatory Order required Davis-Besse to contract with outside organizations to perform independent assessments in the areas of operations, engineering, corrective actions, and safety culture. In addition, FirstEnergy established action plans to reduce the backlog of maintenance and corrective action items, improve the corrective action program, and ensure a safety culture where individuals feel free to raise safety issues.

The NRC will perform inspections beyond the regular oversight program to monitor these independent assessments and the status of the action plans.

The NRC uses a color-coded system to measure the safety significance of problems and inspection findings at nuclear plants ranging from green, through white and yellow, to red, the most significant.

A white finding at Davis-Besse dealing with inoperable emergency sirens identified during testing in May 2004, remains open and will result in an additional inspection later this year to review the utility's corrective actions.

The letter notifying FirstEnergy of the transition from the NRC Oversight Panel to the normal Reactor Oversight Process is available on the NRC's web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>. Use accession number ML051400049 to locate the document.

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