



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I
475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa.
Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

No. I-05-030

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May 31, 2005

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NRC TO DISCUSS 2004 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS FOR SALEM AND HOPE CREEK NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of PSEG Nuclear, LLC, on Wednesday, June 8, to discuss the agency's annual assessment of safety performance at the Salem and Hope Creek nuclear power plants. The period of performance to be discussed is Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2004. In addition, there will be a discussion of PSEG actions aimed at improving performance in several areas, including safety-conscious work environment, problem identification and resolution, procedural adherence and quality of engineering products.

PSEG is the owner of the plants, located in Hancocks Bridge (Salem County), N.J.

The meeting, which will be open to the public for observation, is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Bridgeport Holiday Inn, One Pureland Drive in Swedesboro, N.J. The hotel is located off Exit 10 of Interstate 295. Before the session is adjourned, NRC staff will be available to answer questions from the public on the plants' safety performance, as well as the agency's role in ensuring safe operation of the facilities.

"The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Salem and Hope Creek plants and the nation's other commercial nuclear power facilities," NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins said. "This meeting will provide an opportunity for a discussion of our annual assessment of safety performance with the company and with local officials and residents who live near the plant. Our goal is to explain the NRC oversight process and make as much information as possible available to the public regarding our regulation of these facilities."

Overall, the Hope Creek and Salem Unit 1 and 2 plants operated safely during the period. The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear power plant performance. The colors start with "green" and then increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.

During most of 2004, a "white" inspection finding remained open for Salem Unit 1. The finding involved inadequate corrective actions that resulted in an emergency diesel generator turbocharger failure in September 2002. Although such findings are typically closed within four

quarters, this finding stayed open for a longer period of time to allow PSEG additional time to complete a root cause evaluation of the problem and implement corrective actions. A follow-up supplemental inspection completed on Sept. 30, 2004 determined the company's response was adequate, leading to the closure of the finding as of early November. All of the other inspection findings and performance indicators for Salem Unit 1 were "green" in 2004.

In the case of Salem Unit 2, all of the inspection findings and performance indicators were "green" last year.

While the Hope Creek plant had all "green" performance indicators during 2004, it received two "white" inspection findings. One of the findings, issued in the first quarter, involved inadequate maintenance on a rotating screen system used to filter water taken from the Delaware River for cooling purposes at the facility. The shortcoming led to the system's failure and the unavailability of an associated cooling-water pump system. A supplemental inspection performed last September concluded that the company's corrective actions were appropriate, and the finding was closed in the fourth quarter of last year.

The other "white" finding for Hope Creek was issued in the fourth quarter and involved inadequate evaluation for a degraded level control valve on a moisture separator drain tank. The problem with the valve resulted in the failure of a drain line from the tank in October 2004 that forced a shutdown of the plant. An NRC supplemental inspection will be conducted in June in response to the finding.

Meanwhile, the NRC staff has determined that a cross-cutting issue in the area of problem identification and resolution for the Salem and Hope Creek units will remain open. A cross-cutting issue is one that affects several different areas of performance. This decision is based on additional inspection findings and documented shortcomings in 2004. Specifically, there were multiple inspection findings at the plants last year that were attributable, at least in part, to problem identification, problem evaluation and the effectiveness of corrective actions.

Further, a cross-cutting issue in the area of safety-conscious work environment will remain open for the plants, with the NRC continuing to monitor the company's progress. The issue, which involves maintaining an environment in which workers feel free to raise safety concerns, was noted in the agency's mid-cycle assessment letter for the plants, issued last Aug. 30. "While we recognize that PSEG has taken significant steps to evaluate the station's work environment and initiated actions to begin addressing deep-seated causes, it is too early to assess whether or not the work environment at the station is significantly improving," Mr. Collins wrote in the annual assessment letters for the plants.

In light of the two cross-cutting issues, the NRC will apply heightened oversight to the Salem and Hope Creek plants during the current assessment period. This scrutiny will involve, among other things, a review of PSEG's detailed improvement plans related to safety-conscious work environment, periodic management meetings, an oversight coordination team and enhanced baseline inspections.

Routine inspections are performed by four NRC resident inspectors assigned to the plants and by inspection specialists from the Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa., and the agency's headquarters in Rockville, Md. Among the areas of plant operations to be inspected this year are radiological safety, emergency preparedness and the licensed operator requalification program.

Letters sent from the NRC Region I Office to plant officials address the performance of the plants during the period and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. The letter regarding the Salem nuclear plant is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/salm_2004q4.pdf . The letter regarding the Hope Creek nuclear plant is available at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/hope_2004q4.pdf .

The notice and agenda for the annual assessment meeting are available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) under accession number ML051290287. ADAMS is accessible via the agency's web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html> . Help in using ADAMS is available by contacting the NRC's Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737 or by e-mail at PDR@nrc.gov .

Current performance information for Salem Unit 1 is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/SALM1/salm1_chart.html .

Current performance information for Salem Unit 2 is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/SALM2/salm2_chart.html .

Current performance information for Hope Creek is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/HOPE/hope_chart.html .

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