



NRC NEWS

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NRC RETURNS PERRY TO REGULAR OVERSIGHT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has determined that the Perry Nuclear Power Plant has taken sufficient corrective actions to allow its return to routine agency oversight as of March 2. The plant, operated by FirstEnergy, was placed under the heightened NRC oversight in August 2004.

The plant, located in Perry, Ohio, was placed under heightened oversight as a result of three “white” findings, involving equipment failures of low to moderate safety significance.

The three findings involved safety system problems and the utility’s failures to properly analyze and correct these problems to prevent recurrence. (For more detail, see NRC press release III-04-044, “NRC to Increase Regulatory Oversight of Perry,” of Aug. 12, 2004.)

Even though the utility took actions to correct the equipment problems shortly after discovery, the NRC did not consider two of the “white” issues fully resolved because of the underlying problems of human performance and problem identification and resolution that remained to be addressed.

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

When the number of findings and their importance to safety 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 have to report on the status of corrective actions and answer questions from the NRC.

As a result of increased oversight at Perry, the NRC performed a broad, in-depth inspection from January 2005 to May 2005. The inspection looked at the causes of safety-related equipment problems, at the adequacy of existing programs used to identify, evaluate, and correct performance issues, and at other areas of plant operation that could be affected by similar causes. The inspection also reviewed the Perry Performance Improvement Initiative developed by the utility to improve plant performance.

The inspection showed that the plant was operating safely and that its programs were adequate. However, the inspection did identify deficiencies in the areas of corrective actions and human performance.

Following the inspection, the utility revised its Performance Improvement Initiative to address the NRC's findings and observations. The utility committed to make substantial and sustained improvements in four areas: human performance, corrective action program implementation, maintenance procedure adequacy, and emergency preparedness.

In September 2005, 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 Perry would remain under increased oversight until the NRC finds demonstrated improved performance in the four areas listed above.

The NRC spent nearly 2000 hours on supplemental inspections in addition to regular oversight activities to make sure that the plant had taken sufficient corrective actions to resolve the long-standing "white" findings and that substantial improvements have been made in the areas of human performance and problem identification and resolution.

Based on NRC inspections and assessments, the Agency concluded that the utility's corrective actions have been sufficient to return the Perry plant to regular oversight.

"Perry has continued to operate safely and staff and management worked over the past two and a half years to improve plant performance," said NRC Regional Administrator James Caldwell. "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 will be 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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