



NRC NEWS

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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March 27, 2007
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NRC TO DISCUSS 2006 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR PALO VERDE NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet in Avondale, Ariz., on April 3, with representatives of Arizona Public Service Company to discuss the agency's assessment of safety performance for last year at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station.

The meeting, which will be open to the public, is scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. at Estrella Mountain Community College, North Community Room, 2nd Floor of Estrella Hall, 3000 N. Dysart Road, Avondale.

In addition to the performance assessment, the NRC staff will also discuss the recent decision to increase its oversight of Palo Verde due to performance problems.

Before the meeting is adjourned, the NRC staff will be available to answer questions from the public on the safety performance of Palo Verde, as well as the NRC's role in ensuring safe plant operation.

"Palo Verde is being operated safely," said Bruce S. Mallett, NRC Region IV Administrator. "But improvements in performance are needed. The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss our annual assessment of safety performance with the company and with local officials and residents."

A letter sent from the NRC Region IV office to plant officials addresses the performance of the plant during 2006 and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. It is available on the NRC web site at:

http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/palo_2006q4.pdf

Palo Verde has been under increased NRC oversight since the fourth quarter of 2004 following a finding for a substantial safety issue. Inspectors found that APS had incorrectly left air pockets in portions of the emergency core cooling system at each reactor that could have hindered the system's operation during certain types of accidents. The finding remains open because APS has not effectively addressed performance problems.

Those include a lack of questioning attitude, lack of technical rigor and poor operability determinations by workers - factors which contributed to a finding issued by the NRC last month for problems with the diesel generators at Unit 3, moving Palo Verde into a higher level of NRC oversight.

Two substantive cross-cutting issues in the areas of human performance and problem identification and resolution have also remained open since the NRC's 2004 end-of-cycle assessment. APS has also had numerous operational challenges since 2004, including multiple reactor trips and unplanned shutdowns.

Routine inspections at Palo Verde are performed by resident inspectors assigned to the site and by inspection specialists from the Region IV office in Arlington, Texas. Among the areas of plant operations to be inspected this year by NRC are a review of safety culture, emergency operations, engineering, maintenance, radiological protection as well as several supplemental inspections associated with emergency diesel generators, design and control issues, and the effectiveness of corrective actions.

Current performance information for Unit 1 is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PALO1/palo1_chart.html . Current performance information for Unit 2 is available at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PALO2/palo2_chart.html . Current information for Unit 3 is available at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PALO3/palo3_chart.html .

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