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Lisle IL 60532

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Contact: Viktoria Mitlyng
Phone: 630-829-9663

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E-Mail: opa3@nrc.gov
Web site: www.nrc.gov

NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT PERRY PLANT DUE TO A SCRAM AND FEEDWATER PROBLEMS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is conducting a special inspection at the Perry Nuclear Power Station to review the causes of a reactor scram (automatic shutdown) and problems with systems designed to supply and maintain appropriate water level in the reactor.

On Nov. 28, 2007, FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company notified the NRC that the Perry Nuclear Power Station shut down automatically at 6:32 AM CST.

The plant shut down safely and is currently in a stable shutdown condition.

“Although public health and safety were not at risk as a result of the event,” said Regional Administrator James Caldwell, “it is important for us to understand what caused the scram and multiple equipment problems that took place. Our special inspection team is also tasked with reviewing the utility’s response including how the plant proposes to fix problems they find and prevent their recurrence.”

The cause of the scram has not yet been determined. Coincident with the scram, the plant experienced a loss of two turbine-driven feedwater pumps. The utility has not yet determined what caused the failure of the feedwater pumps. Reactor feedwater pumps are used to supply water to the reactor when the plant is in operation.

Following the scram, the plant experienced problems with some of the equipment used to maintain proper water level in the reactor when the reactor feedwater pumps are not available.

However, other back-up systems were available to maintain safe water levels in the reactor. Public health and safety were not at risk due to the equipment problems.

The utility is looking into the causes of the scram and the equipment issues.

The NRC Region III office responded to the situation at the plant by manning its Incident Response Center to evaluate plant conditions. NRC resident inspectors were also evaluating the situation on-site.

Region III dispatched a four-person special inspection team to the plant on the day of the event. The inspection is focusing on the cause of the scram; the failure of the turbine-driven feedwater pumps; and problems with some of the other equipment used to maintain proper water level in the reactor when the feedwater pumps are not available; as well as the utility's performance.

The duration of a special inspection cannot be determined in advance. The average duration of a special inspection is 7 days. The inspection report will be issued about 45 days after the inspection is complete. It will be available through the NRC RIII Office of Public Affairs and at the NRC web site: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

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