



NRC NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs Region III
2443 Warrenville Road
Lisle IL 60532

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Contacts:

Viktoria Mitlyng 630-829-9662

Prema Chandrathil 630-829-9663

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E-Mail: opa3@nrc.gov

Web site: www.nrc.gov

NRC TO DISCUSS 2009 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR PALISADES NUCLEAR POWER PLANT MAY 11

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold a public meeting with representatives of Entergy Nuclear Operations on Tuesday, May 11, to discuss the agency's assessment of safety performance for last year at the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. The plant is located in Covert, Mich., roughly five miles south of South Haven.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. EDT at the Holiday Inn Express, 1741 Phoenix Rd. The NRC staff will present the results of the annual assessment, talk about the NRC and its range of activities and be available to respond to questions or comments from the public.

"The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Palisades plant and the nation's other commercial nuclear power facilities," NRC Region III Administrator Mark Satorius said. "This meeting allows us to discuss our annual assessment of safety performance with the company and area residents. One of NRC's main goals is to explain to people in the community how the agency regulates nuclear power plants."

A letter sent from the NRC Region III Office to plant officials addresses the performance of the plant during the period 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/pali_2009q4.pdf.

The NRC's assessment concluded Palisades operated safely during the 2009 period. The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear plant performance. The colors start with "green" and then increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.

NRC inspectors identified one "white" finding of low to moderate safety significance in 2009. This finding involved the degradation of a neutron absorber material in the plates that surround the fuel in the spent fuel pool. The spent fuel remained in a stable condition because another control system, soluble boron, was in place to ensure the safety function was met. The

NRC will conduct a supplemental inspection to make sure the problems surrounding the finding have been fully understood and resolved by the utility.

The letter also addressed one substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of human performance which has been resolved by the utility in 2009. Cross-cutting issues are issues that “cut across” multiple areas of plant operation. Examples of cross-cutting issues include problems associated with the plant staff’s ability to identify and correct problems, to develop effective procedures and adhere to these procedures. Cross-cutting issues cannot be quantified and are not assigned safety significance. When a substantive cross-cutting issue is identified at a nuclear power plant, the NRC expects the problem to be corrected.

At Palisades, the NRC identified a cross-cutting issue that involved a lack of clarity in the plant’s procedures and work planning in mid 2008. The utility took steps to address these issues. By the end of 2009, the NRC observed sustained improvement in the areas of concern and closed the cross-cutting issue.

Palisades will continue to receive the detailed inspection regime used by the NRC for plants. Routine inspections are performed by two NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the Region III Office in Lisle, Ill., and the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md. In addition to the supplemental inspection, the areas of plant operation to be inspected this year by NRC specialists are radiation protection, fire protection and reactor license renewal.

Current performance information for Palisades is available on the NRC’s web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PALI/pali_chart.html.

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