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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT HARRIS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is launching a special inspection at Progress Energy's Harris nuclear power plant to assess the circumstances surrounding the April failure of two main steam isolation valves.

The plant, operated by Progress Energy, is located near New Hill, N.C., about 20 miles southwest of Raleigh.

The plant had shut down and was in the process of cooling down for refueling on April 21 when two main steam isolation valves failed to close. Following additional operator actions, one of the two valves was closed a little more than half an hour later. The other valve took three hours to close.

Main steam isolation valves in a nuclear plant are used to shut off steam and play an important role in limiting the release of that steam during certain accident scenarios. While there were no safety implications related to this event at the Harris plant, there was a potential safety risk had one of those accident scenarios occurred while the valves were in a degraded state.

"There was no immediate threat to public safety, but this event does raise important questions that need to be addressed," said Victor McCree, Region II Administrator. "Our resident inspectors and our Special Inspection Team will work diligently to understand what occurred at Harris and why."

The NRC's resident inspectors at Harris immediately began assessing the incident, and are continuing to monitor the licensee's activities. They will be supplemented beginning this week by a four-member Special Inspection Team from the NRC's Region II offices in Atlanta and NRC Headquarters in Rockville, Md. The team will, among other things, develop a timeline, review Progress' actions leading up to the event, examine the performance history of the valves and evaluate the company's response.

The on-site portion of the inspection will take several days. A report documenting the results should be issued within 45 days of the completion of the inspection.

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