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FORT CALHOUN RATED "SUPERIOR" IN ONE AREA, "GOOD" IN THREE OTHERS IN LATEST NRC ASSESSMENT REPORT

Fort Calhoun Station, a nuclear power plant near Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, has received performance ratings of "superior" in engineering and "good" in operations, maintenance and plant support in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest systematic assessment of licensee performance (SALP) for the facility.

The SALP report was sent September 4 to Omaha Public Power District, which operates the plant. The report evaluates the plant's performance from January 26, 1996, to August 2 of this year.

NRC and OPPD officials will discuss the report during a meeting set for 9 a.m. on Wednesday, September 24, in the Fort Calhoun Training Center auditorium. The meeting will be open to public observation. NRC officials will be available afterwards to speak with reporters, state and local officials, and members of the public.

NRC systematic assessment reports rate licensees in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support -- and assigns ratings of Category 1, 2, or 3 depending on whether performance in those areas was superior, good or acceptable. Fort Calhoun was given the following scores on the current SALP and previous SALP in 1996:

Functional areas & ratings

	Current	Previous
Plant Operations	2	2
Maintenance	2	2
Engineering	1	1
Plant Support	2	1

In his cover letter to the report, NRC Regional Administrator Ellis W. Merschoff said, the plant continued to be operated in a generally safe and conservative manner, although he noted "an overall decline in performance" in three of the four areas.

Performance in plant operations remained good, Mr. Merschoff said, and has been characterized by safe and conservative operations. However, human performance deficiencies have continued to occur throughout the period and represent an important challange to improved performance.

Performance in the maintenance area declined but remained good overall, Mr. Merschoff said. He cited notable instances in which the conduct of maintenance challenged plant operations, and instances when poor maintenance planning left plant equipment off line and resulted in unnecessary radiation exposure to maintenance personnel.

Plant support performance declined from a superior level, but remained good overall. Actions taken in response to fuel failures were a strength, but inconsistent performance during the biennial emergency exercise, weaknesses in implementing the access authorization program, and a number of fire protection hardware problems led the decline in performance.

Although engineering remained a superior category, Merschoff noted a decline in performance in that area as well. Engineers failed to identify problems in the fire protection and process piping erosion/corrosion areas, he said.

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Editors: A copy of the full SALP report is available from this office or via internet at www.nrc.gov/OPA.