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**SOUTH TEXAS PROJECT RATED 'SUPERIOR' IN THREE AREAS,
'GOOD' IN ANOTHER, IN LATEST NRC SYSTEMATIC ASSESSMENT REPORT**

South Texas Project, a two-unit nuclear power plant near Bay City, Texas, has received an evaluation of "superior" in three functional areas and "good" in the fourth in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest systematic assessment of licensee performance (SALP) report.

The report was sent December 22 to STP Nuclear Operating Co. (STPNOC), which operates the plant. It evaluates the plant's performance between March 24, 1996, and November 15, 1997. The ratings indicate an overall improvement in performance since the previous SALP assessment period.

NRC and STPNOC officials will discuss the report during a meeting set for 1 p.m. on Monday, January 12, in the Nuclear Support Center auditorium at South Texas Project. The meeting will be open for public observation. NRC officials will be available afterward 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 assign ratings of category 1, 2, or 3 which characterize performance as superior, good or adequate. South Texas Project was given the following scores on the current SALP and previous SALP in 1996:

<u>Functional areas & ratings</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>Previous</u>
Plant Operations	1	2
Maintenance	1	1
Engineering	2	2
Plant Support	1	1

In his cover letter to the report, NRC Regional Administrator Ellis W. Merschoff commented on each of the four areas evaluated:

“Overall performance in the Plant Operations area improved and attained the superior rating of Category 1,” Mr. Merschoff said. He noted teamwork, supervision, communication, and implementation of emergency procedures as strengths in the operations department.

Successful outage planning and execution, along with effective routine maintenance, characterized the Maintenance area. Mr. Merchoff said maintenance programs have resulted in “superior material condition at the plant.”

In Engineering, Mr. Merschoff characterized performance as “very good,” and said “Engineering support to other organizations was generally of high quality, with continued strong performance of systems engineering in support of operations and maintenance.” Problems noted in an earlier enforcement action led the NRC to conclude that management attention was needed to obtain timely corrective action for setpoint problems, to focus attention on control of calculations, and to assure that design engineering condition reports related to calculation deficiencies were correctly classified.

Continued superior performance in emergency preparedness and upgrading of security programs led to a Category 1 rating in Plant Support, Mr. Merschoff said.

Mr. Merschoff also noted that the NRC found STPNOC has a strong corrective action program in place and functioning well, which has resulted in the plant finding and correcting many of its own problems.

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EDITORS: A copy of the full SALP report is available from this office on request, or on internet at www.nrc.gov/OPA.