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NRC STAFF RATES BYRON NUCLEAR PLANT "SUPERIOR" IN 2 AREAS,  
"GOOD" IN TWO OTHERS IN LATEST PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has rated the Byron Nuclear Power Station "superior" in maintenance and engineering and "good" in operations and plant support in the agency's latest assessment of plant performance. The two-reactor plant, operated by Commonwealth Edison Co., is near Byron, Illinois.

The review, called the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP), covers the period from August 1996 through May of this year.

The SALP report will be discussed in a meeting between the NRC staff and utility officials at 1 p.m. on July 27. The meeting will be in the Byron Nuclear Station Training Building, 4450 N. German Church Road in Byron.

The meeting is open to public observation. Members of the NRC staff will be available after the meeting for comments and questions from the public and news media.

NRC SALP reports evaluate utilities in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering, and plant support -- and assign ratings of Category 1, 2, or 3 depending on whether their performance in those areas is superior, good or acceptable. The report on Byron gives the plant a "Category 1" rating -- indicating superior performance -- in maintenance and engineering and a "Category 2" rating -- indicating good performance -- in operations and plant support.

The ratings in the most recent assessment of the Byron plant were the same as in the previous report.

"Overall, performance at the Byron station was very good," said NRC Acting Regional Administrator Carl J. Paperiello. "A large number of challenges, such as extensive modifications and unique tests during the Unit 1 steam generator replacement and the Unit 2 refueling outages, were effectively addressed."

He told the utility, "Noteworthy was the safety conscious and conservative decision making by your staff and management." Routine operations were "well controlled" and infrequently

performed activities, like reactor startup and shutdown, were "excellent," he said. He did, however, note that errors were made while taking equipment out of service and that some ineffective interdepartment communications affected plant operations.

"Maintenance activities were conducted professionally and management involvement was strong, contributing to high equipment availability and reliability, generally excellent material condition, and effective maintenance rule implementation," Dr. Paperiello said.

In engineering work, he cited the quality of the engineering activities for the Unit 1 steam generator replacement project and the generally excellent material condition of the plant.

"Plant support activities were effective overall with strong programs and emergency preparedness and security, and improved chemistry procedure adherence," Dr. Paperiello said. While the radiation program was effectively implemented, the NRC staff did note numerous deficiencies in radiation work practices and in the radiological posting program.

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