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NRC STAFF PROPOSES TWO \$55,000 FINES FOR SIMILAR VIOLATIONS
AT BRAIDWOOD AND BYRON NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed two \$55,000 fines against Commonwealth Edison Co. for similar violations of NRC requirements at its Braidwood and Byron Nuclear Power Stations.

The plants, which have two reactors each, are located at Braidwood, Illinois, and near Byron, Illinois.

The utility was cited for failing to vent possible gas accumulations from certain pumps and piping at the two plants.

The issue was found by a Commonwealth Edison engineer at the Braidwood plant in February of last year. He discovered that pumps and piping were not being vented every 31 days, as required, in the centrifugal charging system, which is part of the emergency core cooling system at the plant.

The same situation was found at the Bryon Station, which is similar in design to the Braidwood plant.

The two plants were not complying with the venting requirement because the pumps did not have vents on them and because the system design minimized the possibility that gases would accumulate in the pump and associated piping.

However, neither plant sought to change the venting requirement contained in the plant's NRC license and continued to operate in violation of the license requirement.

The continuing violation of the NRC requirement was identified in NRC inspections in May and June of this year at the two plants.

NRC inspectors at Byron also identified a vent in a second portion of the emergency core cooling system which was not checked periodically as required.

The potential safety consequences of these violations were low. The venting is performed to make sure no gases accumulate that could affect the functioning of the systems. The system design, however, minimizes the possibility that this would occur. The piping was also tested after the issue was identified by the NRC at the two sites, and the tests confirmed that no gases had accumulated at the high points.

"While the potential safety consequences of these violations are low, the regulatory significance is high," said A. Bill Beach, NRC Regional Administrator, in notifying the utility of the fines.

"NRC involvement was necessary in order to ensure strict compliance with the [license] requirements and the necessary [license] changes were made," he added.

The NRC staff has subsequently granted license amendments for Braidwood Unit 2 and Byron Unit 2. Braidwood Unit 1 and Byron Unit 1 were granted temporary relief from their license requirements to vent the valves and piping, pending review of license amendment requests.

Commonwealth Edison has until November 3 to pay the fines or to protest them. If the fines are protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the utility may request a hearing.

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