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**SOUTH TEXAS PROJECT PERFORMANCE REMAINS ACCEPTABLE
IN NRC'S LATEST PLANT REVIEW**

Public meeting scheduled to discuss results of the Plant Performance Review

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has found in its latest Plant Performance Review (PPR) that safety performance remains acceptable at the South Texas Project (STP) nuclear power plant, located near Bay City, Texas.

NRC's review covers the period from November 16, 1997, to January 25, 1999. Officials from the NRC and STP Nuclear Operating Co. (STPNOC), the operator of South Texas Project, will discuss the PPR during a meeting set for 9 a.m on Thursday, March 25 in the Nuclear Support Center auditorium at the plant site. The meeting is open for public observation. NRC officials will be available afterwards to speak with reporters, state and local officials, or members of the public.

In a letter to STPNOC President William T. Cottle summarizing the review findings, NRC Branch Chief Joseph I. Tapia said, "Overall performance at South Texas Project continued to be acceptable. A strong safety focus in response to equipment problems and during routine operations was exhibited." Mr. Tapia also said that owing to the steady performance only the "core inspection" program will be conducted during the coming six months.

The Plant Performance Review, which is conducted every six months, is an interim measure NRC is utilizing to monitor nuclear power plants' safety performance. NRC began using it after suspending the Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance (SALP) program pending development of a new assessment mechanism.

Previously, SALP reports were the principal means by which the NRC assessed nuclear power plant performance and informed the public of its findings. The new plant assessment regimen will be tested in a pilot program at eight plants beginning in June. If successful, it will be applied nationwide in January of next year. A full description of the new program can be found on the NRC website at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm>.

Plant Performance Reviews are conducted by the NRC staff to determine the amount of inspection that will be required at a given plant during the coming six months. The information is also used by senior NRC managers during their annual review of the performance of all the nation's nuclear plants. No grading system is applied and the only terms used to describe overall performance are acceptable or unacceptable.

The full text of the Performance Review letter is available by calling Region IV public affairs, or on the NRC website at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/ppr>.

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