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NRC INSPECTION TEAM TO PRESENT FINDINGS ON WELDING, LOADING  
OF SPENT FUEL CASK AT POINT BEACH NUCLEAR PLANT

A Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspection team will meet Thursday, October 1, with Wisconsin Electric Power Company officials to discuss the findings of its review of the loading, welding and ultrasonic testing of a spent fuel storage cask at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station. The Station is near Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

The meeting will be at 11 a.m. in the Two Creeks Town Hall, located at State Highway 42 and Tapawingo Road north of Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

The four-person inspection team is headed by Ross Landsman, a project engineer from the NRC's Region III Office. During the week of August 31, the team observed Wisconsin Electric's resumption of loading of the concrete and steel casks with spent nuclear fuel from the plant. Casks with this fuel are located on a concrete pad on the plant property.

Specialists in the team observed the welding and reviewed the ultrasonic testing of the VSC-24 cask lids. Other areas checked by the team included radiological controls, procedures, welder qualifications and training, and the equipment used.

Once the cask was loaded with spent fuel, the cask lids were welded and tested. Following the testing, the cask was moved to the storage pad where two other VSC-24 casks are currently in use.

The NRC in mid-August lifted restrictions on the loading of spent nuclear fuel into VSC-24 dry storage casks at Point Beach. An NRC confirmatory action letter last year documented the utility's agreement not to load any more of those casks until problems associated with the cask closure welds were resolved. On four occasions between 1995 and 1997 utilities using the VSC-24 casks had cracks occur in either the weld for the inner lid or the outer lid. In each case, the welds were repaired and reexamined.

Ultrasonic inspection of the welds was developed as a corrective action to confirm that the entire volume of the weld is sound.

The VSC-24, designed by Sierra Nuclear, is a vertical system made up of two casks, one inside the other. The outer container is 18 feet high with an 11 foot

diameter and can hold 24 spent fuel assemblies. The outer walls are made of steel-reinforced concrete greater than two feet thick, with an inner steel lining. The inner container, known as the multi-assembly sealed basket, has two separately welded lids which cover the assemblies. The inner lid is five inches of material encased in steel. The outer lid is a thick steel disc welded in place over the inner lid.

Wisconsin Electric plans to load two additional VSC-24 casks by the end of the year to permit a full core offload of Unit 2 in December. The cask loaded this month was the first VSC-24 loaded at the Point Beach plant since May 1996.

The meeting between the NRC staff and Wisconsin Electric officials will be open to public observation. At the close of the meeting there will be an opportunity for questions and comments from members of the public.

The team will issue a written report in several weeks.

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