

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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I-99-35

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC ISSUES LATEST ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AT NINE MILE POINT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has found that safety performance remains acceptable, with a few areas of weak performance, in the agency's latest performance review of the Nine Mile Point nuclear power plant in Scriba, N.Y. Niagara Mohawk Power Corp. operates the two-reactor plant.

The review assesses performance at Nine Mile Point from April 1998 to January 1999.

In a letter to Niagara Mohawk outlining the results of the review, NRC Region I official Richard V. Crlenjak said, "Operator control of plant evolutions was safe and conservative. Human performance and work control were improving, but problems in these areas require continued management attention." He also noted that plant material condition was generally good.

According to Crlenjak, heightened engineering management involvement resulted in better problem identification and more critical plant design reviews. Site programs in the areas of radiation protection, security and emergency preparedness continued to be a strength. Continued attention by plant management is warranted in work prioritization, the backlog of engineering work and the implementation of the corrective action program.

In addition to the NRC's normal inspection program, the Regional office plans to conduct initiative engineering inspections to review the installation of modifications, engineering support activities and logic system functional testing deficiencies.

The text of the plant performance review (PPR) letter is available from the NRC Region I Office of Public Affairs and on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/ppr>.

NRC reviews safety performance twice a year at every licensed nuclear power plant in the nation. These reviews give the agency staff an integrated assessment of plant performance and provide a basis for planning inspection activities.

PPRs are an interim measure NRC is utilizing to monitor nuclear power plant safety. The agency began using it for this purpose after suspending the Systematic Assessment of License Performance (SALP) process until a new oversight and assessment program is developed. Previously, SALP reports were issued every 12 to 24 months.

The new reactor oversight and assessment program being developed will provide quarterly performance reports, based on a number of performance indicators and on inspection findings. This program will be tested at eight sites beginning in June and will be extended to all plants next January. A full description of the new program is available on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/primer.htm>.

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NRC ISSUES LATEST ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AT FITZPATRICK

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has found that safety performance remains acceptable at the James A. FitzPatrick nuclear power plant, in Scriba, N.Y. The plant is operated by the New York Power Authority (NYPA).

In a letter to NYPA outlining the results of the NRC's plant performance review, NRC Region I official Richard V. Crlenjak said: "Overall, performance at FitzPatrick was acceptable, but declined somewhat during this assessment period, as reflected by increased plant challenges caused by equipment problems and lapses in operator performance during some events and infrequent evolutions."

Crlenjak also said routine operations were generally conducted well. He noted that the fall 1998 outage was "generally successful with respect to refueling and modification activities and in addressing material condition problems. Thus operational performance improved following the outage." He said work processes, maintenance activities and engineering support for the plant were effective overall, but continued management attention is needed to address challenges in these areas.

FitzPatrick is a voluntary pilot plant for the NRC's new assessment process, which is still under development and will affect inspections beginning in June. Prior to that, NRC will carry out the normal inspection program and has scheduled two additional inspections at the initiative of the Region I office. An Operational Safety Team Inspection is planned for next month. The second initiative inspection will focus on external occupational exposure controls.

The text of the plant performance review (PPR) letter is available from the NRC Region I Office of Public Affairs and on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/ppr>.

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