



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I
475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. 19406
E-mail: opal@nrc.gov
Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

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Contact: Diane Screnci, 610/337-5330
Neil Sheehan, 610/337-5331

NRC CITES FORMER SUSQUEHANNA NUCLEAR PLANT OPERATOR

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has cited a former control room operator at the Susquehanna nuclear power plant for a violation of agency requirements that occurred in 2006. The violation stems from a failure by the operator to report an off-site arrest as required under the procedures for the plant, which is located in Salem Township (Luzerne County), Pa., and operated by PPL.

As part of the enforcement action – the details of which were determined through the NRC’s Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADRS) process – the individual is required to take several actions, including writing a report that will discuss lessons learned from the event. The report is to be submitted to at least three national organizations for possible publication.

A letter sent to the former operator by the NRC regarding the enforcement action reminds him that “you held a license from the United States government that conferred upon you the special trust and confidence of the American people in the safe operation of nuclear facilities and placed you in the position where your performance is expected to be above reproach. This included, as an NRC Senior Reactor Operator license-holder, your responsibility to follow all licensee procedures to ensure protection of the public health and safety, and to set an example for those under your supervision. Your actions on June 27, 2006, did not meet those standards.”

The individual involved, a Senior Reactor Operator, was arrested on June 19, 2006, for driving under the influence of alcohol. Under plant procedures, he was required to report the arrest to PPL upon his first day back at work, which was June 27, 2006. He also reported for work several times thereafter without reporting the arrest. The arrest subsequently came to light and the operator had his site access suspended on July 24, 2006. He was later dismissed by the company and his operating license was terminated by the NRC.

An investigation into the matter was initiated by the NRC’s Office of Investigations on Aug. 4, 2006, that substantiated the procedure violation.

Subsequent to the identification of the violation, the individual took several actions on his own to demonstrate he had learned from the event, including attending substance abuse counseling and entering into the state’s Accelerated Rehabilitation Disposition Program, which included participating in education awareness and community service.

In a letter sent to the former operator on July 2, 2007, the individual was informed about the investigation results and offered the opportunity to attend either a Predecisional Enforcement Conference or to request the use of Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR). The individual opted for ADR, which, in this context, refers to a process in which a neutral mediator with no decision-making authority assists the NRC and license-holders in reaching an agreement resolving any differences regarding an enforcement action. Toward that end, an ADR mediation session between the NRC and the former operator took place on Sept. 27, 2007, at the agency's Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa.

As a result of that session, a settlement agreement was reached. The terms have now been confirmed by the NRC via a Confirmatory Order issued to the individual. Under that agreement, the NRC and the former operator agree that a willful violation of regulatory requirements occurred, since the failure to promptly notify plant management of the arrest violated the facility's fitness-for-duty/behavior observation program, which is required by the NRC. The NRC is issuing a Severity Level III Notice of Violation to the individual.

Other elements of the agreement include:

- The former operator will write an operating experience report that will address lessons learned from this violation. It will include a discussion of meeting the intent of procedures as part of procedural adherence.
- He will provide the NRC a copy of the report for review and submit it to a minimum of three national organizations for possible publication, including the Institute for Nuclear Power Operations and the Nuclear Energy Institute.
- He will submit a written response to the NRC explaining the reasons why the agency can have confidence in his ability to follow plant procedures and meet NRC regulations should he work in the nuclear industry in the future.
- He will prepare a training plan for licensed and non-licensed operator training at the Susquehanna plant regarding procedural adherence as it relates to meeting the intent of procedures and the lessons learned from the circumstances involved in the violation.
- He will inform the NRC before resuming work involving activities licensed by the agency.
- The actions will be completed within 3 months after the issuance of the Confirmatory Order. In addition, the former operator will send the NRC a letter within 30 days of completion of the actions to provide notification they are done.

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