



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS -- REGION I
475 Allendale Road
King of Prussia, PA 19406

No. I-00-25

April 10, 2000

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NRC, BEAVER VALLEY OPERATOR TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company on Thursday, April 13, to discuss apparent violations of agency requirements relating to pump problems at the Beaver Valley nuclear power plant. FirstEnergy operates the plant, which is located in Shippingport, Pa.

The predecisional enforcement conference will begin at 1 p.m. in the Division of Reactor Projects conference room at the NRC Region I office in King of Prussia, Pa.

The apparent violations pertain to pump failures in February at Beaver Valley Unit 1 and a water hammer event in November at Unit 2.

With regard to the pump failures, Unit 1 has three pumps it uses to draw water from the Ohio River. That water is used for the cooling of non-radioactive, safety-related components in the plant. In early February, two of the pumps at that unit failed to start after a change made to the flow of water around the pumps' seals caused the expansion of pump internals. Both of the affected pumps were in standby mode at the time and the third pump was successfully operating.

In an apparent violation at Unit 2, a plant operator on November 21 found that the discharge expansion joint for the "B" service water pump had become deformed, possibly as the result of a water hammer, or pressure pulse, event in the system. (At Unit 2, the system used to pump water from the river for the cooling of safety-related, non-radioactive components is known as the service water system. Like Unit 1, Unit 2 utilizes three pumps for its system.) Plant engineers subsequently determined that the pump had been relied on to serve as one of two required operable service water pumps from November 15-21. Further, they concluded that since November 9 the degraded expansion joint may not have been capable of withstanding a pump restart.

Although the NRC began using its revised reactor oversight program at all U.S. commercial nuclear plants on April 2, these apparent violations -- because they were identified during inspections that occurred prior to that change -- are being addressed under the previous program.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that the NRC has

determined a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide the licensee with an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the licensee to outline its proposed corrective action.

No decision on the apparent violations will be made at this conference. That decision will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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