

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs, Region II
61 Forsyth Street, Suite 23T85
Atlanta, GA 30303

No: II-98-35
Contact: Ken Clark or Roger Hannah

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Monday, May 11, 1998)

**NRC OFFICIALS SEND INSPECTION TEAM TO CATAWBA
Augmented Inspection Team Will Inspect and Assess Recent Event**

Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials today dispatched an Augmented Inspection Team to the two-unit Catawba nuclear power plant, operated by Duke Energy Company near Rock Hill, South Carolina. The team will assess the circumstances of an event on May 7 which left the Catawba Unit 1 auxiliary feedwater system in a condition different from its design.

NRC officials said no accident occurred. Duke engineers told the agency the plant suffered no adverse effects. NRC's interest is in learning how a failure in the unit's non safety-related, secondary condensate system resulted in operators declaring inoperable all trains of the safety-related auxiliary feedwater system.

Catawba has a primary and secondary water system. The primary system cools the reactor by circulating water directly through the core. It then passes through thousands of tubes into a large cylindrical tank known as a steam generator. The steam generator is filled with water supplied by the secondary system. This secondary system water serves two functions: (1) it absorbs heat from the primary reactor cooling system, and (2) it produces steam which turns turbines to generate electricity. After turning the turbines, this steam is condensed back into water and normally recirculates through the feedwater system to produce more steam. The auxiliary feedwater system serves as a backup to the feedwater system.

On May 7, plant operators determined that, following a planned power reduction, tanks which hold water for use in the auxiliary feedwater system registered a water temperature in excess of system design limits. The operators declared three auxiliary feedwater pumps inoperable due to uncertainty related to their operation under higher water temperatures. Duke attributed the cause to an improper setting on a pump recirculation valve. This erroneous set point, the company believes, resulted in a higher than normal flow of water during the power reduction, diverting some of the hotter water to the auxiliary feedwater system tank.

Operators returned water temperatures to normal and declared the auxiliary feedwater system operable. Permanent corrective actions are being evaluated.

NRC officials said members of the inspection team will arrive at the site Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. Team leader Kerry Landis, a branch chief in the NRC Atlanta regional office's Division of Reactor Projects, will be available to discuss preliminary team findings with the public and the press at the conclusion of the inspection.