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NRC PROPOSES $55,000 FINE AGAINST GPU NUCLEAR CORPORATION FOR VIOLATIONS INVOLVING EMERGENCY SYSTEM AT OYSTER CREEK PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a $55,000 civil penalty against the operator of the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant for two violations of agency requirements relating to an emergency safety system. GPU Nuclear Corporation owns and operates the boiling-water reactor in Lacey Township, N.J.

At issue is the operability of the facility's automatic depressurization system (ADS), which would be needed to reduce pressure in the reactor under certain accident conditions so that emergency coolant could be injected. (Both temperature and pressure inside reactors and their associated systems are at elevated levels when the units are operating.)

The violations were found during an NRC engineering team inspection conducted at the plant between Feb. 23 and April 2. A predecisional enforcement conference regarding the infractions was held on May 29 at the NRC Region I office in King of Prussia, Pa.

Specifically, the NRC determined that GPU Nuclear failed to ensure -- through design control measures -- that there was adequate voltage for the depressurization system's electromatic relief valves to function during a postulated small-break, loss-of-coolant accident, concurrent with a loss of offsite power and the failure of an emergency diesel generator. As a result, only two of the five valves would have been operational and capable of depressurizing the reactor under that accident scenario, reducing the plant's safety margins.

In addition, the NRC found that the voltage requirement in the equipment qualification documentation for the five valves' solenoids, or actuators, was not representative of the actual application as installed. No analysis was performed to validate the established qualification voltage.

NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller, in a letter to GPU Nuclear informing it of the enforcement action, said the violations represent a “significant NRC concern because three of the five (electromatic relief valves) are required to be operable for ADS to accomplish its design basis function of depressurizing the reactor during a small-break loss-of-coolant accident to allow for the low-pressure safety emergency core cooling systems to inject water into the reactor vessel.”

The utility has 30 days to pay the fine or request in writing that all or part it be withdrawn.

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