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NRC RATES PALO VERDE NUCLEAR PLANT `SUPERIOR' IN THREE AREAS AND `GOOD' IN ONE OTHER IN ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station has received performance ratings of "superior" in engineering, maintenance and plant support, and "good" in plant operations in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance.

The SALP report was issued on April 8 to the Arizona Public Service Co., which operates the three-reactor site at Buckeye, Ariz., about 50 miles west of Phoenix. It evaluates the plant's performance for the period from June 2, 1996, through March 7 of this year.

NRC and APS officials will discuss the report at a meeting at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 28, at the Energy Information Center at the Palo Verde site. The meeting will be open to the public for observation; NRC officials will be available afterwards for questions.

SALP reports rate safety performance at nuclear plants in four functional areas -- plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support -- and assign ratings of Category 1, 2 or 3, reflecting superior, good or adequate performance. Palo Verde was given the following ratings on the current SALP and previous SALP in 1996:

<u>Functional areas & ratings</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>Previous</u>
Plant Operations	2	1
Maintenance	1	1
Engineering	1	1
Plant Support	1	2

In his cover letter to the report, NRC Regional Administrator Ellis W. Merschoff explained why the score in plant operations declined. "The performance of the operators during normal and transient operations continued at a high level. However, instances were noted where the overall control of onsite activities and interdepartmental communications were weak," he said.

In maintenance, Merschoff noted the highly effective maintenance rule implementation and individual craft skills. The quality of individual work products was noted as a strength in engineering. In plant support, the NRC noted significant improvements in radiological controls and in plant security, although a small decline in emergency preparedness was seen.

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EDITORS/NEWS DIRECTORS: A copy of the SALP report is available upon request from this office.