



NRC NEWS

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NRC STAFF TO MEET WITH CONSUMERS ENERGY ON APPARENT VIOLATION AT PALISADES NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with Consumers Energy officials on May 8 in Lisle, Illinois, for a Predecisional Enforcement Conference on an apparent violation of NRC requirements in submitting incomplete and inaccurate information to the agency in February of last year concerning a problem at the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. The Palisades plant is at Covert, Michigan.

The meeting will be at 9 a.m. CDT in the Third Floor Conference Room, NRC Region III Office, 801 Warrenville Road, Lisle. The meeting is open to public observation. Members of the NRC staff will be available following the meeting for questions from the public.

NRC inspectors completed an inspection in March which found that the utility had supplied incomplete and inaccurate information to the NRC last year. The information was submitted when Consumers Energy requested authorization to permanently close off one of two steam lines connected to an auxiliary feedwater pump, which is part of a backup system to remove heat from the reactor if the normal feedwater system is lost.

On February 5 of last year, while the plant was shut down for a planned maintenance outage, an underground steam pipe to a steam-driven pump ruptured. The pump was shut down and the leak terminated.

The ruptured pipe was replaced, but the remainder of the underground pipe could not be fully inspected to verify its integrity. The utility decided the steam line was not needed since a second steam pipe was available to provide steam to the pump.

Since the line was no longer considered necessary, the utility requested the NRC to eliminate a requirement that it be tested periodically. In its request, the utility said its past safety analysis had considered the steam line as available for use in just one situation, that of an unlikely fire in one room containing electrical cables. Other means of maintaining the reactor in a safe condition were available without using the steam line in question, the utility indicated.

Based on its review of the information supplied, the NRC granted temporary authorization to eliminate the testing requirement and then approved the permanent closing of the steam line.

NRC inspectors subsequently found a second fire scenario which considered the steam line as available for use to maintain the reactor in a safe shutdown condition following a fire.

The apparent violation being considered in the Predecisional Enforcement Conference is the failure of the utility to identify and evaluate the second fire scenario when it requested the change in NRC requirements for the steam line. Providing incomplete and inaccurate information prevented the NRC from making a full safety review at the time it approved the change.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that a determination has been made that violations have occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. The purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance, to provide the licensee with an opportunity to point out errors that may have been made in NRC inspection reports, and to enable the company to outline its proposed corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violations or any contemplated enforcement action, such as a civil penalty, will be made at the conference. Those decisions will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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