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NRC CITES D.C. COOK NUCLEAR POWER STATION FOR VIOLATION OF LOW TO MODERATE SAFETY SIGNIFICANCE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has determined that a violation of NRC safety regulations at the D. C. Cook Nuclear Power Station near Bridgman, Michigan, should be characterized as "white," meaning that it is an issue of low to moderate importance to safety. The plant, which has two reactors, is operated by American Electric Power Company.

During an inspection in February and March of this year, NRC inspectors found that the company had failed to promptly correct an equipment problem that led to the failure of a turbine-driven pump in the auxiliary cooling water system to function during testing.

The auxiliary feedwater system is used to safely shut down the reactor if problems occur during plant operations and to continue removing heat from the reactor after shutdown. Each unit at D. C. Cook has two motor-driven auxiliary feedwater pumps and one turbine-driven pump. The problem affected only the turbine-driven pump of one unit.

During testing on August 10 of last year, the Unit 2 turbine-driven pump failed to start when a valve controlling steam flow to it failed to open. In December the valve vendor diagnosed the valve problem, but the plant failed to promptly correct the problem. On January 18 of this year, the pump again failed to start during testing because of the identical steam valve problem.

Under its safety significance determination process, NRC officials classify certain conditions at nuclear power plants as being one of four colors which delineate increasing levels of safety significance, beginning with green and progressing to white, yellow or red.

A preliminary "white" finding was described in an inspection report issued April 16 of this year. The letter transmitting the report provided the company with an opportunity to request a regulatory conference to discuss this issue. American Electric Power subsequently informed the NRC that it did not contest the characterization of the safety significance of this finding and did not request a meeting with the NRC staff.

In addition to the white determination, the NRC issued a Notice of Violation to American Electric Power for failing to take prompt corrective action to prevent a recurrence of the valve problem. After the January 18 pump failure, the plant replaced the faulty valve mechanism that prevented the pump from operating.

The white finding may result in future NRC inspections focusing on the plant's corrective action program and its response to the valve problem.

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