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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION OF POTENTIAL SAFETY EQUIPMENT PROBLEM AT POINT BEACH NUCLEAR POWER STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a special team inspection of a potential problem with an auxiliary cooling system at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station. The two-reactor facility, located near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, is operated by the Nuclear Management Company.

On October 29 the company reported that the auxiliary feedwater system might fail to function under certain abnormal conditions. Normal plant operations would not be affected by the problem. The utility took prompt corrective actions to revise procedures and train reactor operators to address the immediate safety concerns. Both reactors remain in operation.

Plant personnel found the problem on October 24 during testing of one of four pumps in the system. 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.

When the pumps are operating, they require a minimum flow of water to prevent damage to the pumps. Each pump has a recirculation pipe that provides a continuous flow of water through the pump.

When plant personnel evaluated the test results, they found that the flow in this recirculation pipe was reduced by foreign material in the pipe. The other three pumps in the auxiliary feedwater system were subsequently tested, and no problems were found.

The auxiliary pumps are designed to start automatically, when needed, but the pump flow must be subsequently adjusted by reactor operators to meet reactor cooling requirements.

As reactor operators reduce the flow from one or more of the pumps, according to standard emergency procedures, the pumps could be damaged because of the lack of adequate water flow due to the buildup of foreign material in the recirculation pipe.

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