



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

801 Warrenville Road

Lisle IL 60532

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. III-03-071

December 3, 2003

CONTACT: Jan Strasma (630) 829-9663
Viktoria Mitlyng (630) 829-9662

E-mail: opa3@nrc.gov

NRC TO DISCUSS SAFETY SIGNIFICANCE OF DELAY IN DECLARING AN EMERGENCY AT PERRY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of First Energy Nuclear Operating Company on December 9 in Lisle, Illinois, to discuss the safety significance of an undue delay in declaring an emergency situation. The facility is located in Perry, Ohio.

The incident occurred on April 24 when damage to irradiated fuel caused an alarm on the fuel handling building gaseous radiation monitor.

The NRC staff has completed a preliminary assessment of the incident and concluded that it had a "low to moderate safety significance." The meeting, called a Regulatory Conference, will allow the utility to provide the NRC with any new information pertaining to the event and to present its view of the event's safety significance. The NRC will then use this information to arrive at a final evaluation of the event's significance.

The meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. (CST) in the NRC's Region III Office, 801 Warrenville Road, Lisle. Visitors should report first to the Second Floor reception area. The meeting is open to public observation; before the meeting is adjourned, members of the public may ask questions of the NRC staff and provide comments.

NRC inspectors found that control room personnel failed to declare an "alert," which is the second lowest classification for an emergency level at a nuclear power plant, in a timely manner as is required by Perry's emergency response procedures and NRC regulations. The event did not have any actual safety consequences. Plant personnel were promptly evacuated from the fuel building and there was no indication of radioactive release above normal levels. However the NRC found the failure to declare an alert had potential safety significance because prompt classification of emergency conditions is required to ensure that actions needed to mitigate an emergency are taken in a timely manner.

The utility has taken corrective actions designed to prevent recurrence of delays in declaring an emergency.

NRC inspection findings are evaluated using a four-level scale of safety significance, ranging from "green" for a finding of minor significance, through "white" and "yellow" to "red," for a finding of high safety significance.

The NRC's preliminary evaluation determined the failure to promptly classify and declare an alert at Perry to be a "white" finding. Information presented by the utility in the Regulatory Conference will be used by the NRC staff, along with its inspection findings, to determine the final safety significance of the problem. The final determination of the safety significance will be posted on the NRC's web site at:

<http://www.nrc.gov/what-we-do/regulatory/enforcement/current.html#reactor>

"White" inspection findings can lead to additional NRC inspections.

The inspection findings are detailed in Inspection Report 2003-006, which can be viewed online at the NRC's electronic reading room by entering the accession number ML033040217:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

###