



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO MEET WITH FIRSTENERGY NUCLEAR OPERATING CO. TO DISCUSS PERFORMANCE OF PERRY NUCLEAR PLANT

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company on Tuesday, April 20, to discuss the results of the agency's assessment of safety performance at the Perry Nuclear Power Plant during 2003. The facility is located in Perry, Ohio.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. in the Quail Hollow Resort, 11080 Concord-Hambden Road, Painesville, Ohio. The public is invited to observe the meeting, and NRC officials will be available before the conclusion of the meeting to answer questions from the public. In addition, the NRC staff will provide an overview of how the agency's Reactor Oversight Process works.

The NRC concluded that the plant operated safely. However, plant performance warrants additional NRC regulatory oversight because of several issues of "low to moderate" safety significance. These issues will lead to additional NRC inspections.

The issues which have led to the heightened NRC oversight include the failure of a high pressure emergency cooling pump to start during testing in October 2002. A followup inspection by the NRC in July 2003 found that, while the utility had repaired the pump, it had not adequately evaluated other safety systems for similar problems; a subsequent inspection in December found that the issue had been adequately addressed.

A second issue involved the failure in September 2003 of a pump in the system which supplies cooling water to various plant safety components. A third finding involved the failure of the utility to declare an "alert" under its emergency plan in a timely manner following damage to a spent fuel assembly which led to increased levels of radioactivity inside the fuel storage area.

All three issues were classified as "white" -- low to moderate safety significance -- under the NRC's system of determining safety significance. The evaluations range from "green" for problems of minor safety significance to white, yellow, and red, which indicates a problem of high safety significance.

Two additional inspections are planned for this year at Perry, one looking at the utility's response to the emergency plan issue and the second, a broader inspection to examine the equipment problems.

In addition, the routine inspection program will be performed by the two NRC resident inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from NRC's Region III office in Lisle, Illinois.

A March 4 letter from the NRC to FirstEnergy officials addresses the performance of the plant during 2003 and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. It is available at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/perr_2003q4.pdf

With regard to security issues, the NRC has issued several orders and threat advisories to enhance security capabilities and improve guard force readiness since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The agency has also conducted inspections to review the implementation of these requirements and has monitored the action of plant operators in response to changing threat conditions. The NRC will continue security inspections during 2004.

Current performance indicators and inspection findings for Perry are available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PERR1/perr1_chart.html

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