



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC CONFIRMS NUCLEAR PLANTS' OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS WITH RESPECT TO ELECTRIC GRID RELIABILITY

The Department of Energy (www.doe.gov) today issued a follow-up report on actions taken to reduce blackout risk following the August 14, 2003, electric grid outage. As part of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's response to the outage, the NRC inspected all 103 operational nuclear power plants to assess the licensees' procedures and protocols for evaluating the reliability of offsite power and the use of that information to adjust plant activities accordingly.

During last year's blackout, affected nuclear plants responded as designed to grid conditions and shut down safely. These plants did not cause the blackout nor contribute to its spread.

NRC Chairman Nils J. Diaz was a member of the joint U.S./Canadian task force established to investigate the causes of the blackout and ways to reduce the possibility of future outages, and was co-chair of its nuclear working group. The task force reported that nuclear plants were maintained in a safe condition following the grid outage through the use of their on-site emergency diesel generators. It recommended a number of actions to reduce the risk of future blackouts. The progress on these actions is reported on in the Department of Energy follow-up report.

"Based on our inspections to assure compliance with NRC regulations, assessment of licensee responses, and assessments completed to date of the results of the audits conducted by the North American Electric Reliability Council, the NRC believes that effective actions are being taken to enhance the availability of offsite power for safe nuclear power plant operation," said Chairman Diaz.

The NRC is responsible for regulating nuclear reactor safety. In Regulatory Issue Summary 2004-05, "Grid Reliability and the Impact on Plant Risk and the Operability of Offsite Power," issued in April, the NRC reminded all plant licensees of how the availability of offsite power can affect nuclear power plant operations and safety. In addition, the NRC pointed out the importance of establishing reliable communications between plants and their transmission system operators, to increase awareness of overall grid conditions.

In parallel, the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) conducted readiness audits of grid coordinators to ensure that operators of the bulk electric systems have the tools, processes, and procedures in place for reliable operation (www.nerc.com).

The NRC will continue to communicate with those external parties responsible for grid

reliability and will continue to encourage and support efforts to make the grid more reliable in order to ensure these aspects of nuclear safety.

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