



NRC NEWS

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NRC TO DISCUSS 2004 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR OYSTER CREEK NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of AmerGen Energy Co., LLC, on Thursday, May 12, to discuss the agency's annual assessment of safety performance at the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant. The period of performance to be discussed is Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2004.

AmerGen operates the plant, located in Lacey Township, N.J.

The meeting, which will be open to the public for observation, is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Ocean County Administration Building, Room 119, 101 Hooper Ave., Toms River, N.J. Before the session is adjourned, NRC staff will be available to answer questions from the public on the plant's safety performance, as well as the agency's role in ensuring safe operation of the facility.

"The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Oyster Creek plant and the nation's other commercial nuclear power facilities," NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins said. "This meeting will provide an opportunity for a discussion of our annual assessment of safety performance with the company and with local officials and residents who live near the plant. Our goal is to explain the NRC oversight process and make as much information as possible available to the public regarding our regulation of these facilities."

Overall, the Oyster Creek plant operated safely during the period. The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear power plant performance. The colors start with "green" and then increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.

As of the fourth quarter of 2004, all of Oyster Creek's performance indicators were "green." However, the plant had one "white," or of low to moderate significance, inspection finding. That finding, issued in the first quarter of 2004, involved a failure of a 4,160-volt electrical cable as a result of ineffective corrective actions for prior similar failures. An NRC supplemental inspection conducted in September of last year in response to that finding concluded AmerGen's corrective actions for the problem were appropriate. Therefore, the finding has been closed out.

Also, an inspection finding preliminarily classified as “white” was identified in January of this year. It involved an inappropriate change in one of the plant’s emergency action levels, that is, the point during a severe accident at which a General Emergency and/or Site Area Emergency would be declared. The finding was finalized on March 1, 2005. That issue remains open pending an NRC supplemental inspection to assess AmerGen’s root cause analysis and corrective actions for the problem.

In addition, the NRC has identified a substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of problem identification and resolution at Oyster Creek. A cross-cutting issue is one that affects several different areas of performance. The issue is based on five NRC inspection findings stemming from a failure by plant staff to fully implement corrective actions developed for identified problems. The NRC plans to closely monitor AmerGen’s corrective actions during routine inspections and inspections targeted at the area of problem identification and resolution.

Routine inspections are performed by two NRC resident inspectors assigned to the plants and by inspection specialists from the Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa., and the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md. Among the areas of plant operations to be inspected this year are radiological safety, fire protection and emergency preparedness.

A letter sent from the NRC Region I Office to plant officials addresses the performance of the plant during the period and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. It is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/oc_2004q4.pdf. The notice and agenda for the annual assessment meeting are available in the NRC’s Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) under accession number ML050960243. ADAMS is accessible via the agency’s web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in using ADAMS is available by contacting the NRC’s Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737 or by e-mail at PDR@nrc.gov.

Current performance information for Oyster Creek is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/OC/oc_chart.html.

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