



NRC NEWS

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO CONDUCT SPECIAL INSPECTION AT WATERFORD NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will conduct a special inspection into unexpected conditions that developed while operators were preparing the reactor at the Waterford 3 nuclear plant for refueling. Entergy Operations runs the plant, located near Taft, La.

On April 19, operators were lowering the level in the reactor coolant system in preparation for lifting the reactor vessel head to begin refueling. Because operators failed to open valves for air to enter the reactor coolant system as the water level was lowered, vapor bubbles formed. The bubbles were pushed through the shutdown cooling system, causing flow to fluctuate.

When operators attempted to open an access hatch in the pressurizer, they subsequently discovered that a vacuum had formed in the reactor coolant system. The vacuum condition was then corrected. Although there was no immediate safety concern, following analysis, the NRC staff has decided to examine the circumstances leading up to the event in a more detailed way using a special inspection.

“While public health and safety were not impacted by this event, we have questions about operator performance and plant configuration control that need to be answered,” Region IV Administrator Bruce S. Mallet said. “If there are lessons to be learned from this event, we will share them with other nuclear plant operators.”

The NRC will dispatch a three-person special inspection team to the site in June to better understand the circumstances associated with the event, the licensee’s response to it, and its risk significance. Prior to the team’s arrival on site, resident inspectors are continuing to monitor the licensee’s ongoing review of the event.

The NRC inspection team includes specialists from the Region IV office in Arlington, Texas. The team is expected to spend about one week on site before returning to the regional office, where information they gather will be analyzed and evaluated.

The report of the special inspection will be publicly available when it is issued, about 30 days after the close of the special inspection. It will be posted in the NRC's electronic reading room at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> . To locate the report, once it is issued, enter the docket number for the Waterford plant (50-382) in the search phrase box.

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