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HEARING REGARDING OYSTER CREEK LICENSE RENEWAL APPLICATION SCHEDULED FOR SEPT. 24-26 IN TOMS RIVER, N.J.

An evidentiary hearing on an issue raised by a coalition of environmental groups with regard to an application to extend the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant's operating license will be held in Toms River (Ocean County), N.J., beginning at 9 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 24, and concluding no later than noon on Wednesday, Sept. 26.

The hearing will take place in Room 119 of the Ocean County (N.J.) Administration Building, at 101 Hooper Ave. in Toms River. (Directions are available at: <http://www.co.ocean.nj.us/ComplexMapPage.aspx>.)

A three-judge Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) panel led by Chairman E. Roy Hawkens will conduct the hearing, which will involve the lawyers for the parties and expert witnesses. Members of the public can observe the sessions but will not be allowed to participate. In the event matters at issue involve the discussion of proprietary information, portions of the hearing may be closed to the public. Members of the public are also advised that NRC procedures prohibit the use of signs, banners, posters and displays at all NRC adjudicatory proceedings.

In July 2005, AmerGen Energy Co., LLC, which owns and operates Oyster Creek, applied to the NRC for a 20-year license extension. The current 40-year operating license for the plant, which is located in Lacey Township (Ocean County), N.J., is due to expire on April 9, 2009.

Subsequently, the State of New Jersey and a coalition of environmental groups requested a hearing on the application. The state's request was eventually turned down, but the coalition had a single contention admitted.

The coalition's contention pertains to the plant's drywell shell, a bulb-shaped, steel liner that surrounds the reactor vessel. In the event of a severe accident at the plant, the shell would direct steam toward a large reservoir of water at the base of the reactor building, where it would be cooled and condensed.

The coalition has raised concerns about corrosion of this liner, specifically in what is known as the sandbed region. During the 1980s, GPU Nuclear, the plant's then-owner, determined that water had accumulated in a sandbed that surrounded a lower section of the shell, thereby causing corrosion. In the

early 1990s, GPU, after an evaluation, removed the sandbed and coated the liner with an epoxy. The company took readings during subsequent plant shutdowns and determined the corrosion had been abated. Although that testing was suspended for several outages, AmerGen performed visual and ultrasonic tests during an outage earlier this year and informed the NRC that those examinations confirmed that the thickness of the drywell shell remained within safety margins.

AmerGen has proposed taking more ultrasonic measurements in 2008, and then during every other refueling/maintenance outage, unless analysis of the measurements establishes that the period between inspections needs to be increased. In its contention, the coalition argues that the proposed period of ultrasonic inspection in the sandbed area is not adequate.

Additional information about the Oyster Creek application review is available at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/licensing/renewal/applications/oystercreek.html> .

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