



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO SPONSOR PUBLIC MEETING ON OCT. 14 IN BRATTLEBORO, VT., REGARDING VERMONT YANKEE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT COOLING TOWERS

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff on Tuesday, Oct. 14, will sponsor a meeting with the public to provide information regarding the cooling towers at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant.

The meeting is scheduled for 4 to 6:15 p.m. at the Latchis Theater, at 50 Main St. in Brattleboro, Vt. (Directions are available on the theater's web site at: <http://www.latchis.com/location.html>.)

During the meeting, the NRC staff will discuss its oversight of the safety-related aspects of the cooling towers and the results of a Special Inspection it conducted with respect to tower leakage. Vermont Yankee's owner and operator, Entergy, will present information on its evaluations and maintenance of the towers, as well as its plans for assuring future tower reliability. Members of the public in attendance will have an opportunity to ask questions of NRC staff regarding the inspection and the towers prior to the meeting's adjournment. Entergy representatives will also be available to answer questions.

The NRC Special Inspection was initiated after tower leakage was identified in July at the plant, which is located in Vernon, Vt. On July 11, leakage was found in one of two mechanical-draft cooling towers at the site. Each tower stands about 50 feet tall and is equipped with 11 cooling cells. The towers, which have a wooden support structure, are routinely used to ensure that water drawn from the adjacent Connecticut River and used for cooling purposes in the plant is within temperature limits spelled out in a state-issued discharge permit before being returned to the waterway. The towers are normally only used during warmer months of the year, from mid-May through mid-October. Water already used in the plant for cooling purposes is piped into a basin contained inside each tower, with fans atop each cell assisting in the removal of heat. At no point does the water come into contact with radioactivity.

Only one of the 22 cells is considered safety-related. That cell, known as cell 2-1 and found in the west cooling tower, would, under an extremely low-probability scenario, be used as an alternate means to cool and shut down the plant.

An estimated 60 gallons per minute was found to be leaking in a non-safety-related cell in the east cooling tower on July 11. The leak occurred when a large pipe, which carries about 90,000 gallons of water per minute, sagged after the underlying horizontal support beam broke away from the vertical column to which it was bolted. Minor cracks were also found on supporting members on two non-safety-related cells in the west cooling tower, including one that sustained a pipe break and partial collapse in August 2007. The safety-related cell was not affected.

The NRC began the Special Inspection into the leakage on July 13, with the inspectors assigned to the review tasked with examining the circumstances surrounding the leakage and any possible impacts on the safety-related cell and an adjacent seismically designed buffer cell. In addition, Bill Borchardt, the NRC's Executive Director for Operations, was sent to the plant around the same time to consult with the inspectors and plant officials on the situation and report back to the agency's Chairman and Commissioners.



A view of one of the cooling towers at Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant.

Additional leakage that was identified last month in one of the cooling towers was also evaluated by the Special Inspection team and will also be discussed during the Oct. 14th meeting. This leakage differs from the July 11th leakage in that the cause was packing material dislodged from a joint in the main water piping for the cooling tower. That led to a small amount of leakage. However, there was no structural damage associated with last month's leak. As was the case with the July leakage, the more recent leakage did not impact the safety-related or seismically designed buffer cells.

The report for the Special Inspection will be available prior to the meeting in the NRC's electronic documents system, which is known as ADAMS (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System). ADAMS is accessible via the NRC's web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>.

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