



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region III
2443 Warrenville Road
Lisle IL 60532

No. III-10-015

Contacts:

Viktorija Mitlyng 630-829-9662

Prema Chandrathil 630-829-9663

May 6, 2010

E-Mail: opa3@nrc.gov

Web site: www.nrc.gov

NRC SCHEDULES REGULATORY CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS AN ISSUE RELATED TO PRAIRIE ISLAND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with the staff of Northern States Power Company, Minnesota, on May 11, to discuss a preliminary finding of low to moderate safety significance associated with the plant's emergency preparedness program. The plant is located in Welch, Minn., 28 miles southeast of Minneapolis.

In May 2009 the utility informed the NRC about a problem with the plant's capability to declare an Alert emergency classification for certain events involving effluent releases from the plant. Specifically, the highest measurement capability of three effluent radiation monitors was too low to identify radiation levels that would lead the plant to declare an Alert, the second lowest of the NRC's four emergency classifications.

In 2006, the plant adopted a new scheme for set points that would lead to different emergency declarations and the set point for declaring an Alert was increased. However, the utility failed to make changes to its program to ensure that Alerts would be declared in a timely fashion.

There have been no actual emergency conditions at the plant that would have required an Alert declaration using this equipment.

"This issue is of concern to the NRC because it constitutes a failure to follow and maintain effective emergency plans designed to ensure a prompt and effective response to an emergency," said Mark Satorius, regional administrator of the NRC Region III office in Lisle, Ill. "The inability to declare an Alert in a timely fashion in these circumstances would not have compromised plant safety but it would have delayed the plant's response to the situation and would have prevented the plant from informing local and state officials in a timely fashion."

The meeting, which will be open to public observation, will begin at 1 p.m. in the NRC's Region III office, 2443 Warrenville Road, in Lisle, Ill. The public is invited to observe and NRC officials will be available to answer questions. Persons wishing to participate in this meeting by toll-free audio teleconference should contact the Region III Public Affairs Officers. This

conference is being held to obtain information to assist the NRC in making an enforcement decision. No final decisions will be made during this meeting.

After the regulatory conference, the NRC will review the information received during the meeting and make a final determination on the safety significance of this issue.

The inspection report documenting this issue and the NRC's final decision will be available through the NRC RIII Office of Public Affairs and at the NRC web site:
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

###

NRC news releases are available through a free list serve subscription at the following Web address: <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/listserver.html>. The NRC homepage at www.nrc.gov also offers a SUBSCRIBE link. E-mail notifications are sent to subscribers when news releases are posted to NRC's Web site.