



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT PILGRIM NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has sent a Special Inspection Team to the Pilgrim nuclear power plant to review operator performance issues that occurred as the reactor was being returned to service from a refueling and maintenance outage on May 10. The plant experienced an automatic shutdown as the reactor was being restarted.

The single-unit boiling-water reactor is located in Plymouth, Mass., and is owned and operated by Entergy Nuclear.

Starting today, the three-member NRC team will, among other things, review plant operator performance and decision-making, the effectiveness of Entergy's response to the event and corrective actions taken by the company to date.

"There were no immediate safety implications associated with the unplanned shutdown," NRC Region I Administrator Bill Dean said. "Nevertheless, we want to gain a better understanding of exactly why the shutdown occurred, what role human performance issues may have played in the event and the steps being taken by the company to learn from this event and prevent it from happening again in the future."

During start-up of the Pilgrim unit on May 10, plant operators were withdrawing control rods to increase the rate of fissioning of the nuclear fuel and add heat to the reactor. While this was taking place, the operators identified a higher-than-expected heat-up rate. In trying to better manage the rate, the operators made several manipulations of the controls to first halt the heat-up and then to re-establish a more reasonable rate. In doing this, the operators did not properly manage the evolution, which resulted in an automatic reactor scram, or shutdown, with all control rods being inserted. The shutdown was safely carried out, with all equipment operating as expected.

An inspection report documenting the team's findings will be issued within 45 days after the completion of the review.

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