



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES TWO WHITE FINDINGS AND A SEVERITY LEVEL III FINDING TO COLUMBIA GENERATING STATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has determined that two inspection findings at the Columbia Generating Station on the plant's emergency preparedness program are "white," meaning they had low to moderate safety significance. The plant, operated by Energy Northwest, is located near Richland, Wash.

The first white finding involved the licensee's failure to maintain a plan to appropriately characterize emergency action levels which could have delayed recognition of some radiological emergency conditions.

The second white finding involved the licensee's failure to maintain adequate methods for assessing and monitoring actual or potential offsite radiation releases from the plant during emergencies. This adversely affected the licensee's ability to assess the consequences of a radiological release and had the potential to impact protective action recommendations necessary to protect public health and safety.

These conditions existed between 2000 and 2011 when they were identified and corrected by the licensee. The violations were evaluated by NRC during an inspection conducted between Oct. 18, 2011 and June 27, 2012.

A violation is also being issued because regulations require the licensee to make prompt notification to the NRC of any event that results in a major loss of emergency assessment capability. The NRC identified these issues during its inspection but the licensee did not report them to the NRC in a timely manner, as required.

After the NRC staff issued preliminary findings, a conference was held on Sept. 20 during which Energy Northwest officials presented their perspective on the root cause of the findings and violations and corrective actions. After consideration, the NRC staff has determined that the inspections findings are appropriately characterized as "white."

The NRC evaluates regulatory performance at commercial nuclear power plants with a color coded process which classifies findings as either green, white, yellow or red in order of increasing safety significance.

The two white findings will move the Columbia Generating Station into the “degraded cornerstone” column of the NRC’s action matrix, resulting in a higher level of NRC scrutiny. This is the third highest level of NRC oversight and Columbia joins seven other nuclear plants in that category. The position of all nuclear units within the NRC action matrix is available at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/actionmatrix_summary.html .

The NRC staff will determine the most appropriate response and notify Energy Northwest of any additional inspections, meetings or activities the agency may plan.

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