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### NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE HOUSTON LIGHTING & POWER \$50,000

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Houston Lighting & Power Company (HL&P) that it proposes to fine the company \$50,000 for violations of NRC requirements committed by employees of an HL&P contractor at the South Texas Project in Matagorda County, Texas.

HL&P has 30 days to respond to the citation. During that time it may pay the civil penalty or protest it. If a protest is denied by the NRC staff, HL&P may ask for a hearing.

NRC bases this enforcement action on results of an HL&P investigation which were documented in NRC inspection reports. The company found that in two instances, one in October 1990 and the other in January 1991, contractor employees falsified documents associated with the replacement of packing rings in safety-related valves. HL&P further found that in both these instances, the individual who falsified the records was directed to do so by a foreman employed by the contractor, Bechtel Energy Corporation.

In a letter to the utility, Robert D. Martin, NRC regional administrator in Arlington, Texas, said the agency is taking enforcement action to emphasize the need for licensees to assure that "all activities, whether conducted by licensee employees or contract employees, are carried out in an environment in which safety and quality are emphasized."

Mr. Martin, however, took cognizance of some other aspects of this case. He said HL&P kept NRC informed when it received allegations of improprieties and took appropriate disciplinary action in cases where those improprieties were confirmed. "NRC also notes," he wrote, "that the individual who brought the January 1991 incident to the attention of Bechtel's on-site management was first threatened by them with a layoff, ostensibly for his unwillingness to transfer to the night shift, and later fired, apparently for his involvement in the incident. When informed of these matters by this individual, HL&P took prompt action to correct this situation, including finding a position in the contract organization for this individual and removing the responsible Bechtel managers from the site."

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Mr. Martin further said that it is noteworthy that the utility's investigation also found that, on some occasions, HL&P supervisors had been acting as a "buffer" between contractor craft workers and their managers. "Without this buffer," he wrote, "there apparently was an atmosphere in the Work Backlog Reduction group that productivity was more important than the

quality of work performed. Apparently, this was either not made known to HL&P management or, if known, not acted upon until these incidents occurred."

NRC is taking no enforcement actions in regard to three other instances of willful violations found by the HL&P investigation. One involved a false time entry on a control room log, another the violation of radiation work permit provisions, and the third an individual falsification of a quality assurance report.

Mr. Martin said NRC considers these matters isolated events of low safety significance committed by non-supervisory employees acting on their own. "Moreover," he said, "these matters were thoroughly pursued by HL&P as part of its self-initiated and extensive program to instill in [South Texas] employees a higher degree of professionalism and [to] improve performance."

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