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NRC STAFF PROPOSES TO FINE GULF STATES UTILITIES  
\$100,000 FOR APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT RIVER BEND PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed Gulf States Utilities (GSU) that it proposes to fine the utility \$100,000 for apparent violations of NRC requirements at the River Bend Station, near St. Francisville, Louisiana.

GSU 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, the company may ask for a hearing.

NRC bases this enforcement action on findings from an inspection conducted April 21-June 22 at River Bend after GSU notified the agency that, on April 19, it had found one of the plant's main steam isolation valves stuck open. GSU's investigation determined that the valve had been in that condition for 51 days, while the plant was operating from February 27 to April 18.

At River Bend, two main steam isolation valves are built into each of the four 24-inch-diameter pipes which carry steam from the reactor vessel to the main turbine. In case of a serious accident -- such as a loss of coolant which could damage the reactor core -- these valves are required to be able to close within a few seconds to minimize both the loss of reactor coolant and the spread of radioactive materials to the environment. GSU's analysis concluded that, in some accident situations, a stuck-open main steam isolation valve could result in significant radiation exposures to main control room personnel.

NRC bases the civil penalty on three violations: (1) the failure in June 1992 to check dimensions of the valve internals after repairs were completed; (2) failures in February and April of this year to detect the stuck valve during performance of required testing; and (3) the resulting operation of the plant for 51 days with the valve stuck open, contrary to the requirements of the plant license. The \$50,000 base civil penalty for violations of this sort was doubled because of the

length of time the valve was stuck open and because GSU missed two opportunities to detect the problem.

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In his letter informing Gulf States of the enforcement action, James L. Milhoan, NRC regional administrator in Arlington, Texas, said a breakdown in the control of both maintenance and operational activities had occurred, causing NRC "significant regulatory concern."

Mr. Milhoan acknowledged that the actual effect on plant safety was minimized by the presence of redundant main steam isolation valves and by the relatively low probability that two isolation valves would fail in the same main steam line. He also noted that GSU promptly repaired the valve and analyzed the contributing causes to the incident. GSU also has described to NRC a long-term corrective action program which appears to encompass the root and contributing causes.

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