

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$100,000 FINE  
FOR VIOLATIONS AT WOLF CREEK

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a civil penalty of \$100,000 against the Wolf Creek Nuclear Operating Corp., operator of the Wolf Creek nuclear power plant near Burlington, Kansas, for three apparent violations of NRC requirements.

The violations were identified during NRC inspections conducted October 7-11 and 21-25 and were discussed by NRC and Wolf Creek officials at a predecisional enforcement conference at the NRC Region IV office in Arlington, Texas, on January 16.

The first violation consists of five instances in which Wolf Creek failed to identify and correct conflicts between technical specifications, which govern plant operations, and written interpretations of those specifications prepared by plant officials. The plant's use of some of the misinterpretations resulted in violations of technical specifications.

In a letter to Wolf Creek, NRC Regional Administrator Ellis W. Merschoff said, ``Your staff stated that one cause [of the first violation] was a `mind set' that permitted the use of operational knowledge in the application of technical specifications which, in some cases, compromised compliance.

``Although the actual safety significance of this violation was low, the circumstances surrounding it are of regulatory significance because of: 1) the management involvement in the violation and 2) the fundamental importance of complying with technical specification requirements,'' Mr. Merschoff said.

Wolf Creek management failed to recognize and correct the problems during its review of the issue, Mr. Merschoff said.

The second violation involves an unauthorized change that plant officials made in January 1995 to the technical specifications concerning the frequency of testing for reactor coolant pump flywheels.

The third violation involves another conflict between technical specifications and the plant's written interpretation of those specifications that address cooling down the reactor system while one of two sets of instrumentation that helps measure reactor conditions was inoperable.

The NRC informed Wolf Creek that its interpretation was erroneous on January 16. However, it remained in place until March 21, when NRC staff informed Wolf Creek that the continued existence of the misinterpretation constituted a continuing violation and Wolf Creek removed it.

``This is of concern to us because your staff did not either rescind the [interpretation] after the inspection, request formal clarification from the

NRC or request a change to technical specifications," Mr. Merschoff wrote.

The NRC has categorized the violations as Severity Level III. The agency's enforcement system uses four Severity Levels, with Level I being the most serious. The utility has 30 days to respond to the NRC's citation, during which time it may pay the penalty or protest it. If the protest is denied, the utility may ask for a hearing.

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