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**NRC STAFF FINDS DECLINE IN TWO AREAS OF PERFORMANCE
IN LATEST EVALUATION OF NINE MILE POINT NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS**

Two areas of performance, operations and engineering, have received reduced ratings in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff's latest periodic evaluation of the Nine Mile Point Units 1 and 2 nuclear power plants. Located in Oswego, N.Y., the plants are owned and operated by Niagara Mohawk Power Corp.

While operations declined from a "superior" to a "good" rating, and engineering saw a drop from "good" to "acceptable," the other two areas of performance reviewed, maintenance and plant support, retained grades of "good."

The NRC issues Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance, or SALP, reports for the nation's commercial nuclear power plants about once every 18 months. Three levels of ratings are used in SALP reports: Category 1 ("superior"), Category 2 ("good") and Category 3 ("acceptable.")

The latest SALP for Nine Mile Point covers the period from June 2, 1996, through November 8.

NRC staff and Niagara Mohawk will discuss the report during a meeting scheduled for noon on Friday, January 9, at the Nine Mile Point site's Nuclear Learning Center. The meeting will be open to the public for observation. Afterwards, NRC staff will be available to speak with reporters, state and local officials, and members of the public.

In a letter to Niagara Mohawk accompanying the report, NRC Region 1 Administrator Hubert J. Miller wrote that the plants' performance was "generally good," but continued management attention is needed to address issues in several areas.

"The Unit 1 plant trip and reactor vessel overfill event

(in November 1996) revealed weaknesses in the management oversight of operations and engineering support activities," Mr. Miller stated. "Lapses in management oversight also resulted in weak performance in other areas, such as maintenance rule program development, and implementation of the radioactive waste and transportation program. Personnel performance errors occurred in all functional areas. . . . There was a lack of consistent performance and improvement."

NRC staff found that in the area of operations, operators generally performed well during plant startups and shutdowns, as well as in response to events. Further, there was conservative decision-making evident in the operation of both units. However, personnel errors were noted throughout the period, and several weaknesses were identified in the licensed operator initial and requalification training programs.

Performance in the area of maintenance was characterized by management involvement and oversight in the planning and execution of activities, particularly during outages. Also well performed was significant corrective maintenance in response to emergent issues. Although personnel errors occurred throughout the period, their frequency and severity decreased during the latter half.

Regarding engineering, management oversight for some important activities was ineffective early in the period and the quality of engineering work varied significantly. In an effort to address those issues, management, organizational and program changes were instituted, and some improvements were noted later in the period. A number of equipment problems challenged the operating organization throughout the period, as did staff attrition and turnover.

Finally, in the area of plant support, the radiological protection program was effectively implemented, with exposures maintained as low as reasonably achievable. What's more, the radiological effluents, environmental monitoring and chemistry programs remained strong. One aspect where problems were noted was in the handling of radiological waste and transportation.

The full SALP report may be viewed on the NRC's Internet web site at <<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>>. The reports for all plants also may be obtained by e-mail, as they are issued. Send an e-mail to listproc@nrc.gov with no subject and the following message: subscribe SALP yourfirstname yourlastname.

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