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NRC ORDER TO PENNSYLVANIA POWER & LIGHT CONFIRMS FIRE BARRIER CORRECTIVE ACTIONS AT SUSQUEHANNA UNITS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a confirmatory order to Pennsylvania Power & Light Company confirming its commitment to complete Thermo-Lag fire barrier corrective actions by the end of April 2000 at its two-unit Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.

Sam Collins, Director of the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, said the order was issued because of concern "that some licensees may not be making adequate progress toward resolving the plant-specific issues, and that some implementation schedules may either be too tenuous or too protracted."

Thermo-Lag is a fire barrier material manufactured and supplied by Thermal Science, Inc., of St. Louis, Missouri, and has been used to provide fire resistance to wiring and equipment at nuclear plants. The NRC has been concerned that Thermo-Lag 330-1 fire barrier material installed by some of its licensees may not provide the intended level of fire protection and that licensees thus may not be meeting regulatory requirements. Between 1992 and 1994, the NRC staff issued letters to all nuclear utilities asking licensees to submit plans and schedules for resolving the issue. All licensees with Thermo-Lag fire barriers have implemented around-the-clock "fire watches," using workers to patrol vital plant areas on a regular basis to watch for signs of fire until corrective actions have been completed.

In a letter to Pennsylvania Power officials, Collins noted that NRC has met with licensees to review their progress in completing implementation of their fire barrier programs, but remains concerned about slow progress on resolution of the issue.

Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. was one of the licensees with which NRC has periodically held meetings. At these meetings, the NRC reviewed Pennsylvania Power & Light Co.'s schedule for Thermo-Lag corrective actions and concluded they are reasonable. The company formally agreed June 3 to the terms of the confirmatory order. Thermo-Lag corrective actions are about 40 percent complete at Susquehanna. About 20 other plants have received or will soon receive similar orders in the coming months.

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Additional information on Thermo-Lag fire barriers can be found on the NRC Internet web page at: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/gmo/tip/tip9826.htm>