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NRC ASSESSES PERFORMANCE OF OYSTER CREEK NUCLEAR POWER PLANT,
WITH 'SUPERIOR' RATING FOR MAINTENANCE, 'GOOD' FOR OTHER AREAS

In the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's latest assessment of its performance, the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant has received ratings of "superior" in one category and "good" in three others. The boiling-water reactor is located in Lacey Township, N.J. It is owned and operated by GPU Nuclear Corp.

The latest Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance, or SALP, report for Oyster Creek covers the period from December 1, 1996, through June 13.

NRC staff and GPU Nuclear officials will discuss the evaluation during a meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. on Tuesday, August 4, at the plant. The session will be open to the public for observation, and NRC staff will remain afterwards to answer questions from members of the press and public.

Four functional areas of nuclear power plant performance are rated in NRC SALP reports: plant operations, maintenance, engineering and plant support. Ratings of Category 1 ("superior"), Category 2 ("good") and Category 3 ("acceptable") are assigned. The reports are issued roughly once every 18 months for each plant.

Oyster Creek received a rating of "superior" in the area of maintenance, up from a "good" rating in the last SALP report issued in January 1997. Plant operations and plant support retained "good" ratings since the last report, while engineering declined from a "superior" rating to "good."

The NRC found that the overall performance at the plant was good during the period. "Improvements were noted in many areas, including a reduction in personnel errors," NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller wrote to GPU Nuclear in a letter summarizing the report. "Material condition continued to improve, resulting in a limited number of equipment challenges; a superior rating was assigned in the maintenance area. However,

performance in the Engineering area was mixed, resulting in a lowering of the performance rating for this area."

In the area of operations, operator performance during day-to-day activities and major planned "evolutions," such as startups and shutdowns, was determined to be excellent, supported by strong management oversight and a commitment to high standards. On the negative side, there were some performance problems involving equipment configuration control and technical specification implementation.

Maintenance did a very good job of keeping the plant in top material condition and ensuring the availability of equipment, and there was sustained strong performance in work and radiological control practices.

Performance in the area of engineering was found to be mixed. Although engineering support to plant operations and problem resolution was generally good, and there was strong use of industry experience, weaknesses were identified in programs and procedures. For example, aspects of the motor-operated valve program remained incomplete.

Continued good performance was noted in the area of plant support, with significant improvements made in radiological exposure control and radiological waste-handling practices. Nevertheless, there were problems in the radiological effluents control program.

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(NOTE: A copy of the full SALP report is available on the NRC's Internet home page at www.nrc.gov.)