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NRC TO DISCUSS PERFORMANCE, WORK ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENTS OF HOPE CREEK AND SALEM NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of Public Service Electric and Gas (PSEG) on June 16 to discuss the results of the agency's annual assessment of safety performance at the Hope Creek and Salem Unit 1 and Unit 2 nuclear power plants. PSEG operates the plants, which are located in Hancocks Bridge (Salem County), N.J.

Following the discussion of the annual assessment results, PSEG will also discuss the results of three assessments of the environment for raising and addressing safety issues at the plants, as well as its plans to address the assessment findings and improve the environment. In a January 28, 2004 letter, the NRC provided PSEG with interim results of an ongoing agency special review of the work environment at the plants. PSEG, in a February 27, 2004 letter to the NRC, responded by outlining its plans to assess the work environment. Since then, the NRC and PSEG conducted a public management meeting on March 18th to discuss the assessment plans. Current information related to the work environment assessments is available at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> using Accession Number ML040610856.

"This is an important matter," NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller said with regard to the work environment issues. "The company has undertaken a thorough review. We look forward to discussing the results and plans for improvement."

The June 16th meeting, which will be open to the public for observation, is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Select Bridgeport, which is located off Exit 10 of Interstate 295 in Swedesboro, N.J. Before the session is adjourned, NRC staff will be available to accept questions and comments from the public on the plants' safety performance and work environment, as well as the role of the NRC in ensuring safe operation of the facilities.

The annual assessment performance period to be discussed is January 1 to December 31, 2003. In addition, NRC staff will provide a brief overview of how the agency's Reactor Oversight Process works.

Letters sent from the NRC Region I Office to PSEG regarding the annual assessment results are available on the agency's web site. The letter regarding the Hope Creek plant can be found at: www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/hope_2003q4.pdf . The letter regarding the Salem plants can be found at: www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/salm_2003q4.pdf .

Overall, the Salem units operated safely and met all cornerstone objectives during the period. (Cornerstones are program areas where NRC measures plant safety performance.) All of the inspection findings and performance indicators at Salem Unit 2 were classified as "green" in 2003. However, Salem Unit 1 received a "white" inspection finding, representing low to moderate safety significance, involving inadequate corrective actions to prevent the recurrence of emergency diesel generator turbocharger failures. (The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess performance at nuclear power plants. The colors start with "green" and then increase to "white," "yellow" or "red," commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.) As a result, the plant will receive additional scrutiny until the NRC is satisfied the problem has been satisfactorily addressed.

Current performance information for Salem Unit 1 is available on the NRC web site at: www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/SALM1/salm1_chart.html .

Current performance information for Salem Unit 2 is available on the NRC web site at: www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/SALM2/salm2_chart.html .

The Hope Creek plant also operated safely and met all cornerstone objectives during the period. On May 10th of this year, however, the NRC finalized a "white" inspection finding for the facility. The finding involved procedural inadequacies and adherence issues that led to one of the plant's service-water traveling screens failing on July 1, 2003. The screens filter water pumped from the river for cooling purposes. On June 1st, as part of its continuous review process, the NRC completed an assessment of the finding. Because of the finding, the agency will conduct a supplemental inspection to review the company's root cause analysis and corrective actions for the problem.

Current performance information for the Hope Creek plant is available on the NRC web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/HOPE/hope_chart.html

In addition, the NRC staff last year identified a substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of problem identification and resolution affecting all three of the plants. The issue involved instances of ineffective and untimely problem evaluations and corrective actions. As part of the annual assessment of the plants, the NRC concluded the issue should remain open based on numerous inspection findings indicating continued weaknesses in this area. The issue will be discussed at the June 16th meeting.

On the subject of security issues, the NRC has issued several orders and threat advisories to enhance security capabilities and improve guard force readiness since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The agency has also conducted inspections to review the implementation of these requirements and has monitored the action of plant operators in response to changing threat conditions. The NRC will continue security inspections during 2004.

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