



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region III
2443 Warrenville Road
Lisle IL 60532

No. III-10-016

Contacts:

Viktoria Mitlyng 630-829-9662

Prema Chandrathil 630-829-9663

May 17, 2010

E-Mail: opa3@nrc.gov

Web site: www.nrc.gov

NRC TO DISCUSS 2009 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR PRAIRIE ISLAND NUCLEAR POWER PLANT MAY 20

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will hold a public meeting with representatives of Northern States Power Co. – Minnesota on Thursday, May 20, to discuss the agency’s assessment of safety performance for last year at the Prairie Island Nuclear Power Plant. The two-unit plant is located in Welch, Minn, roughly 50 miles southeast of Minneapolis.

The meeting, which will be open to the public, is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. CDT at the Twin Bluff Middle School Auditorium, 2120 Twin Bluff Rd in Red Wing. The NRC staff will present the results of the annual assessment, talk about the NRC and its range of activities and be available to respond to questions or comments from the public.

An NRC “Open House” will be held at 5 p.m. CDT to provide interested members of the public with an opportunity to talk informally with agency staff.

“The NRC continually reviews the performance of the Prairie Island plant and the nation’s other commercial nuclear power facilities,” NRC Region III Administrator Mark Satorius said. “This meeting allows us to discuss our annual assessment of safety performance with the company and area residents. One of NRC’s main goals is to explain to people in the community how the agency regulates nuclear power plants.”

A letter sent from the NRC Region III Office to plant officials addresses the performance of the plant during the period and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. It is available on the NRC Web site at:

http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/prai_2009q4.pdf

Overall, the Prairie Island plant operated safely in 2009. There were, however, some changes in inspection findings. The NRC uses color-coded inspection findings and performance indicators to assess nuclear plant performance. The colors start with “green” and then increase to “white,” “yellow” or “red,” commensurate with the safety significance of the issues involved.

A “white” finding of low to moderate safety significance was identified in 2009 for both Units 1 and 2. This finding involved a shipment of refueling equipment and tools from the power

plant which exceeded regulatory requirements for the transportation of nuclear material established by the NRC and Department of Transportation. When the shipment arrived at its destination in Waltz Mill, PA, radiation monitors showed that the radiation levels on the underside of the package exceeded the allowed radiation levels. The elevated radiation levels were on the underside of the package limiting the potential that a member of the public would come into contact with that area of the package. Though the finding did not have an actual impact on public health and safety the NRC conducted an additional inspection to ensure the utility had taken actions to fully understand and correct the issue.

An additional “white” finding was indentified for Unit 2 which will result in additional oversight. This finding is associated with the inadequate design of the component cooling water system which circulates water to cool equipment including the reactor cooling pumps. The reactor coolant pumps help circulate water through the reactor during operation. The concern is that certain events such as high energy line breaks, severe tornado winds and severe earthquakes could damage or break the component cooling water system piping and potentially lose cooling water to the equipment. No actual event has occurred. The NRC will conduct a supplemental inspection to make sure the problems surrounding the finding have been fully understood and resolved by the utility.

The letter also addressed one substantive cross-cutting issue in the area of human performance. Cross-cutting issues are issues that “cut across” multiple areas of plant operation. Examples of cross-cutting issues include problems associated with the plant staff’s ability to develop effective procedures and adhere to these procedures. Cross-cutting issues cannot be quantified and are not assigned safety significance. When a substantive cross-cutting issue is identified at a nuclear power plant, the NRC expects the problem to be corrected.

At Prairie Island, the NRC identified a cross-cutting issue that involved conservative assumptions, procedural adequacy and procedural compliance in mid 2009. The NRC held a public meeting where the utility discussed their actions to address the problem. Some improvement has been seen but these actions have not yet proven effective. These issues will remain open until the utility’s actions have resulted in sustainable improvement.

Prairie Island will continue to receive the detailed inspection regime used by the NRC for plants. Routine inspections are performed by two NRC Resident Inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the Region III Office in Lisle, Ill., and the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md. In addition to the supplemental inspection, the areas of plant operation being inspected this year are radiation protection, equipment design and review of the groundwater protection initiative.

Current performance information for Prairie Island is available on the NRC’s web site at: http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI1/prai1_chart.html (Unit1) and http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PRAI2/prai2_chart.html (Unit2).

###

NRC news releases are available through a free list serve subscription at the following Web address: <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/listserver.html>. The NRC homepage at www.nrc.gov also offers a SUBSCRIBE link. E-mail notifications are sent to subscribers when news releases are posted to NRC's Web site.