



NRC NEWS

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NRC CITES ENERGY NORTHWEST FOR SAFETY VIOLATION AT COLUMBIA GENERATING STATION

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Staff has determined that a violation of NRC regulations involving emergency preparedness plans for Columbia Generating Station should be characterized as “yellow,” meaning it is an issue of “substantial safety significance.” Columbia Generating Station is a nuclear power plant operated by Energy Northwest near Richland, Washington.

The NRC made the determination following a regulatory conference with Energy Northwest at the agency’s regional office in Arlington, Texas, on November 26. The purpose of the conference was to review the safety significance of deficiencies in emergency preparedness plans for employees of companies that lease buildings within the CGS exclusion area boundary.

The decision made final a preliminary assessment of the issue as a “yellow” finding. Under the NRC’s new reactor oversight process, inspection findings are evaluated under a significance determination process and assigned a color that indicates safety significance. Findings with very low safety significance are labeled “green.” “White” findings have low to moderate importance to safety and may require additional NRC inspection. “Yellow” findings have substantial safety significance, and “red” findings high safety significance.

A “yellow” finding requires the company to take necessary corrective action and will lead to additional NRC inspection in the area of the finding. No fine or other enforcement action is warranted. The finding was identified in an inspection from July 23 to September 24 and involves the apparent failure to include several private businesses operating on the property at Columbia Generating Station in the site emergency plans. This oversight could have prevented people working at these businesses from being notified promptly, included in protective actions or provided with radiological monitoring in the event of a plant accident releasing radioactive material.

Following the regulatory conference, the NRC acknowledged that some measures were in place to provide for protective actions for these workers. However, the staff concluded that the measures were not sufficiently comprehensive and were not sufficiently planned or established to meet the standard of providing a range of protective actions for those members of the public routinely working inside the exclusion area boundary.

Energy Northwest has 10 days to appeal the NRC’s determination of significance. The company is required to respond in writing within 30 days, detailing its immediate and long-term corrective actions.

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