



NRC NEWS

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NRC SPECIAL INSPECTION TEAM TO REPORT ON REVIEW RELATED TO LOSS OF SPENT FUEL RODS AT MILLSTONE UNIT 1 NUCLEAR PLANT

The results of an NRC special team inspection stemming from the loss of two spent fuel rods at the Millstone Unit 1 nuclear power plant in Waterford, Conn., will be presented at a meeting open for public observation on Tuesday, January 15. The inspection exit meeting will begin at 3 p.m. at the Leland F. Sillin Training Center, near the entrance to the Millstone facility.

The NRC staff will remain after the meeting to answer questions from members of the public.

Last October, the NRC dispatched a special inspection team to the plant to evaluate the comprehensiveness of an investigation conducted by the plant's previous owner, Northeast Utilities (NU), into the possible whereabouts of the rods and the circumstances surrounding their loss. The four-member NRC team spent several weeks on-site and, among other things, reviewed the company's root-cause analysis.

The results of NU's investigation were provided to the NRC in early October 2001 by Dominion Nuclear, the company that currently owns and operates Millstone. (Millstone Unit 1 is permanently shutdown, but Units 2 and 3 remain in operation.) In its report, NU concluded that although the exact location of the rods could not be determined, it's likely they are at one or more of four sites: two low-level radioactive waste disposal sites -- one in Barnwell, S.C., the other in Hanford, Wash. -- and two spent fuel pools -- the Millstone 1 pool and one at a General Electric facility in Vallecitos, Calif.

NU first reported to the NRC that it could not account for two spent fuel rods, which had been stored in the Millstone 1 pool, on December 15, 2000. Company records indicated that the rods were last verified to be in the pool in 1980, but there was no documentation of their presence in the pool beyond that time.

Ever since the notification by NU, the NRC has been closely following the company's efforts to find the missing rods through on-site inspections and periodic conference calls. In addition, the agency has maintained a liaison with the appropriate states.

Neither the companies nor the NRC believe the material was stolen. There are significant radiological security controls at nuclear power plants such as Millstone that would make such a theft dangerous, difficult and highly unlikely. The NRC does not believe that a public health and safety problem exists based on the likely locations of the spent fuel rods. Furthermore, the rods would not pose any risk of being used for nuclear weapons due to their low uranium and plutonium content.

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