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NRC FINALIZES “WHITE” FINDING FOR COOPER NUCLEAR STATION

Cooper Nuclear Station will receive additional oversight from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission based on a violation that adversely affected the reliability of an emergency diesel generator. The plant, which is operated by the Nebraska Public Power District, is near Brownville, Neb.

The NRC uses a color-coded system to categorize inspection findings. They range from “green,” for an issue of very low safety significance, to “red” for a highly significant safety issue. In this case, the violation has been determined to be “white,” indicating the issue is of low to moderate safety significance. The finding is based on an NRC inspection completed on April 24.

On November 8, 2006, plant workers replaced an electrical circuit board on an emergency diesel generator. The diesel generator is used to supply electrical power to plant safety systems in the event of a loss of off-site power. During testing on November 13, 2006, the diesel generator started properly, but was not able to perform its function to supply electricity to other systems due to a faulty circuit board. In evaluating the root cause, the licensee failed to promptly identify and correct the problem with the circuit board.

“The NRC determined the licensee missed two opportunities to identify and correct the defective circuit board. They failed to properly evaluate the suitability of the circuit board prior to its installation, and they failed to properly evaluate and correct the cause of the November 13, 2006 failure,” NRC Region IV Administrator Bruce S. Mallett said.

“As a result of those failures, the emergency diesel generator failed to perform its function again on January 18, 2007,” Mallett said. “Although the incident at Cooper did not adversely affect public health or safety, it is significant because the NRC requires its licensees to have programs in place to correctly identify the root cause of significant problems in order to prevent recurrence. Moreover, the problem affected the reliability of a very important piece of equipment.”

At the request of the licensee, NRC held a regulatory conference at its Region IV office in Arlington, Texas, on July 13, and based its final significance determination, in part, on information presented there. NPPD officials have 30 days to appeal the decision.

The NRC will conduct a supplemental inspection at a future date to evaluate the company's corrective actions.

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