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NRC NEWS
Office of Public Affairs, Region I
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No. I-14-002 January 27, 2014

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NRC Dispatches Special Inspection Team to Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has initiated a Special Inspection at the Calvert Cliffs nuclear power plant in Maryland. The inspection will further review an unplanned shutdown of both reactors at the site that occurred on Jan. 21.

Comprised of three members, the inspection team will begin its work today (Jan. 27) at the plant, which is located in Lusby, Md., and operated by Constellation Energy LLC. The review will evaluate what happened during the event, including the response by plant operators and safety systems. The inspection will also examine the event's causes and any related issues. It will expand on initial assessments performed by two NRC inspectors, one of whom is the Senior Resident Inspector assigned to the facility on a full-time basis. The Senior Resident reported to the plant when the reactors shut down.

"We want to gain a better understanding of the chain of events that caused both of the reactors to simultaneously shut down and equipment anomalies subsequent to the plant trips," said NRC Region I Administrator Bill Dean. "This inspection is designed to shed additional light on not only why the outages happened but how the plant operators handled them."

Nuclear power plants not only send power out to the electrical grid, they also take a certain amount of power in for operational purposes. During a winter storm on Jan. 21, an electrical supply system that distributes some of this off-site power to the plant was temporarily interrupted. At this point it appears that snow and ice affected a ventilation louver filter, causing an electrical fault, or short-circuit. Breakers tripped, or opened, as designed to clear the fault, shutting down the electrical supply system.

Subsequently, several electric-powered plant systems and components shut down, including motors for moving control rods and circulating-water pumps for Unit 2, triggering an automatic plant shutdown. The electricity loss also caused the Unit 1 main turbine control circuit to malfunction, which led to the automatic shutdown of Unit 1.

Both of the pressurized-water reactors were safely taken out of service following the power interruption, and there were no impacts on public health and safety.