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Utility must finish long list before restart of Millstone 3

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By SUSAN E. KINSMAN
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EAST LYME - Federal regulators said Tuesday they will not allow the Millstone 3 nuclear power plant to restart before Northeast Utilities corrects

1,200 safety problems and weaknesses in management, oversight and responsiveness to employee safety concerns.

The regulators used a public hearing Tuesday to outline where their inspectors will focus their attention to make sure that the plant in Waterford is safe to operate.

It was the first time the Millstone oversight team of the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission had presented its independent plan for review.

"Our primary job is not only to identify what needs to be inspected but to get the resources we need to do the inspections," said Wayne D. Lanning, director of the oversight team.

Lanning said his inspectors will focus on the equipment and other corrections Northeast Utilities is making to the plant, as well as the "soft issues"

concerning weaknesses in NU's management oversight and ability to create an atmosphere in which workers feel comfortable raising safety issues.

NU's program to identify and correct problems will also be a focus. "The corrective action program has to be demonstrated to be effective before NU

will be allowed to restart any of its plants," Lanning said.

The NRC inspections will parallel the oversight work of an independent review panel ordered by the NRC to confirm that the repairs NU is making to the plant have been made and are working.

But Lanning said the independent review panel will look only at the corrections to equipment, plant design and safety analysis - not the critical issues

of management oversight and operation of the employee concerns program.

The NRC has admitted mishandling a number of whistle-blower complaints, and NU whistle-blowers have blamed the NRC for not protecting them from harassment and discrimination by their former employer.

Paul Blanch of West Hartford, a former NU engineer and whistle-blower, has criticized the "independence" of the review panel that will be named by and paid for by NU with approval of the NRC. But he said leaving the review of employee concerns solely to the NRC was ludicrous.

"It's incredible that the independent review team will only be reviewing hardware issues, not the employee concerns program. It doesn't make sense," Blanch said. "The independent team is looking at 5 percent and the NRC is looking at the other 95 percent. That doesn't give me a whole lot of confidence," he said.

NU, the owner and operator of Millstone, previously submitted its plan for identifying and correcting the widespread problems at Millstone.

The focal point of NU's restart plan is a "punchlist" of 1,200 safety-related issues that NU said needs to be corrected before the plant may be restarted. Neither NU nor the NRC will estimate when that will be. About 10 percent of the list has been completed.

The utility has identified another 1,200 discrepancies that it said it plans to correct after the plant goes back into operation.

Millstone 3 was shut down in March and like Millstone 1 and 2 will remain closed because of safety concerns until NU convinces the NRC that it can operate them safely.

All three plants are on the NRC's watch list of the nation's most troubled plants and need a vote of the NRC before any of them may restart.

More than 100 people attended the public hearing in the East Lyme Community Center. But many of them left before Lanning outlined his plan two hours into the 7 p.m. meeting.

For the first two hours, trust, not restart, was the issue under discussion.

Nearly a dozen witnesses said they were sceptical that the NRC would be able to do the job.

"We have nothing to go on but your past record. You guarantee me that these new programs are going to work. How are you going to make a determination that they are working when you haven't been able to do it in the past?" said Donald DelCore Sr. of Montville, a former NU employee and whistle-blower.

Charlie Luxton, a lifelong Waterford resident, agreed. He said it was too soon to be talking about restarting any of the Millstone plants while criminal investigations, inspections and key safety issues remain unresolved.

"Clearly NU, with its present management, has no business asking permission for restart. Restart is absurd. More accountability is needed

before

people of this region will ever trust this utility again," Luxton said.

Lanning said issues affecting "management integrity" would be resolved prior to restart.

Jim Yankee of Vernon said NU should never get to that point.

"Don't ever dream of opening these reactors. The inherent danger of this technology keeps people of Connecticut at risk," Yankee said. "Money will

have no value if our lives are ruined and our land is permanently contaminated."

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