

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: RIII-96-72
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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$325,000 FINE AGAINST WISCONSIN ELECTRIC CO.
FOR VIOLATIONS OF NRC REQUIREMENTS AT POINT BEACH NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$325,000 fine against Wisconsin Electric Power for violations of NRC safety requirements at the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station. The plant is located at Two Creeks, Wisconsin.

"The issues we identified reflect significant weaknesses in the areas of operations, maintenance, and engineering...which involve all levels of your organization," said A. Bill Beach, NRC Regional Administrator in notifying the utility of the fine.

He continued, "While these issues are of significant regulatory concern, we are also concerned by the inadequate response (and sometimes lack of a response) by your staff to most of these issues."

The company was cited: 1) for instances when reactor operators were inattentive to their duties; (2) for starting up Point Beach Unit 2 in April with a safety system -- an auxiliary feedwater pump -- inoperable and for failing to adequately test the plant's safety injection system; (3) for failing to take adequate steps to increase the minimum number of pumps required in the equipment cooling water system; and (4) for violations associated with the hydrogen burn in a spent fuel storage cask after it was loaded in May. [Additional details on the violations are attached.]

Fines of \$100,000 each were proposed for the first three items. A fine of \$25,000 was proposed for the violations associated with the spent fuel storage cask.

Wisconsin Electric has until January 2 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the utility may request a hearing.

The NRC's letter to the utility and the Notices of Violation are available on the NRC's internet web site at:
<<http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports>>.

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ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON VIOLATIONS
Point Beach Nuclear Power Station

1. Control room inattentiveness

On July 15 an NRC inspector observed on-shift control room operators viewing a training videotape in the control room. On July 31 an NRC inspector observed a control room operator leave his watch station to get a cup of coffee without the required short-term watch relief by another operator. On August 14 an NRC inspector observed a control room operator fail to respond to a control board alarm until he was prompted by a senior reactor operator. On August 14 the utility found that its on-duty Technical Adviser left the site in violation of NRC requirements and that being offsite but nearby had been an accepted practice for the past five years.

2. Auxiliary Feedwater System operability and Safety Injection System testing

The utility started up Unit 2 in April with a safety system -- an auxiliary feedwater pump -- inoperable. The pump provides water to the plant's steam generators when the main feedwater pumps are not available. Valves in the pump's discharge line had been left closed following maintenance, and the utility did not conduct a required post-maintenance test which would have found that the valves remained closed.

The testing program to measure the discharge pressure of pumps in the Safety Injection System did not have the correct pressure criterion and used gauges which were found to be out of calibration. The Safety Injection System is one of the plant's emergency reactor cooling systems. From December 1992 to July of this year, the gauges were found to be within their required accuracy only once in 20 calibrations.

3. Inadequate Corrective Action -- Service Water Pumps

Wisconsin Electric did not take adequate corrective action after determining in April that it needed to increase the minimum number of service water system pumps required to be operable. The service water system supplies cooling water to various plant equipment. There are six pumps in the system. The existing requirement called for a minimum of two pumps, and the utility did not take adequate steps to increase the minimum when it determined that three would be needed in some accident conditions to provide the desired flow and pressure.

4. Violations Associated with Dry Cask Spent Fuel Storage

On May 28 welding on a shield lid for a loaded spent fuel storage cask ignited hydrogen gas which had accumulated under the lid. There was no apparent damage to the cask or the spent fuel, and

there were no injuries. The hydrogen was generated by an unexpected chemical reaction between a zinc coating inside the cask and boric acid in water temporarily in the cask.

The company was cited for failing to determine the suitability of the zinc coating for use in the dry cask storage system and for failing to take proper action on earlier indications of a gas build up in the cask.

The company was also cited for failing to appropriately transfer the weight of the cask shield lid into several procedures and for inadequate safety evaluations of the rigging used to lift the cask shield lid and of the procedure to weigh the lid.

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Attachment to News Announcement RIII-96-72
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