

NORTH COUNTY NEWS

January 23, 2009
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NRC to Indian Point: We need more info

By Abby Luby

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) wants to know how Entergy will manage aging components for another 20 years at Indian Point, one of the country's oldest nuclear power plants.

Indian Point units 2 and 3 were built in 1974 and 1976 and are currently operating on a 40 years license.

Last week the NRC requested more information in response to Entergy's application to extend the twin reactor's current operating license which expires in 2013 and 2015.

Brian Holian, director of the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation's Division of License Renewal, sent Entergy a Safety Evaluation Report (SER) on January 15. The report cited potential problems with various components at Indian Point.

"We want more information about what they are doing to ensure that components remain in good working shape," said NRC spokesperson Neil Sheehan. "Our staff didn't have enough information they need on aging management programs [at Indian Point]."

The NRC's concern is how Entergy will monitor tritium-contaminated water that was discovered leaking from the 400,000-gallon spent fuel pool at Unit 2 in the fall of 2005. Although Entergy has committed to monitor the groundwater for tritium (a radioactive isotope) every three months, the NRC officials said they are worried about undetected damages to the pool's concrete and rebar areas.

"There are some areas they just can't access to check for leaks in the spent fuel pool," said Sheehan. "Although Entergy has confirmed the pool isn't leaking we still have questions about what they are going to do long term."

The NRC asked Entergy why it didn't commit to more inspections for leaks during the proposed extended years of operation. In their license application Entergy claimed that additional inspections were not necessary. Sheehan said the NRC is concerned because Indian Point Unit 2 was built without a leak detection system underneath the spent fuel pool, a system that is common at most reactor spent fuel pools.

Detecting cracks in pressurized spray heads was another NRC concern. The spray heads are stainless steel and are an essential component that maintains the right pressure in the reactor coolant system, a system needed to prevent a core meltdown. Often the heads get brittle and crack, an aging problem which can be detected by ultrasonic methods.

"We asked the company how what state-of-the-art methods would be used to detect cracks in the pressurized spray heads at Units 1 and 2," said Sheehan.

The utility company has to answer several other requests. The NRC also wants to know why Entergy neglected to spell out how data on aging components would be collected and evaluated if their license was extended. Additionally, in case of fire, the NRC needs to know how Entergy will check the feed water supply to the steam generators needed in case of a fire.

The license renewal application was also cited for being ambiguous and unclear when making distinctions between components that showed effects of aging and components whose aging signs were acceptable.

In an email to *North County News*, Entergy spokesperson Jerry Nappi said “The publication of the NRC’s Safety Evaluation Report is another step forward toward license renewal of Indian Point.”

Nappi said that since Entergy purchased Indian Point in 2001, it has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new equipment, security and training “to ensure that the plant continues to safely provide electricity for New Yorkers well into the future.”

The deadline for Entergy to respond to the NRC is March 16.

“It’s incumbent upon Entergy to get these items fully addressed before we go ahead to the final SER,” said Sheehan.

While final conclusions on Entergy’s license renewal application is expected in July, 2009, the NRC is moving ahead with the environmental impact statement section in the license renewal process. The first of two public hearings on the EIS will be held February 12. Comments on the draft EIS supplement will be accepted until March 11.

The SER is available at the NRC Web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/licensing/renewal/applications.html>.