



Union of Concerned Scientists

Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

September 26, 2006

Donald E. Jackson, Acting Chief
Engineering Branch 1
Division of Reactor Safety
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Region I
475 Allendale Road
King of Prussia, PA 19406-1415
Earth

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE “PRECONDITIONING” VIOLATION AT OYSTER CREEK

Dear Mr. Jackson:

I observed the observation in NRC Inspection Report 05000219/2006007 dated September 21, 2006, and raise you this question:

DID THE AMERGEN STAFF WHO KNEW THE NRC TEAM WAS PLANNING TO WALKDOWN THE TORUS ROOM AND GOT THERE FIRST TO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, EMPTY THE JUGS COLLECTING WATER FROM TUBE RUN-OFF FROM THE FORMER DRYWELL AND SAND BED DRAINS, VIOLATED THE SPIRIT – IF NOT THE LETTER – OF LONGSTANDING NRC EXPECTATIONS ON “PRECONDITIONING?”

AmerGen’s excuse for emptying the jugs strains belief. According to the NRC inspection report:

The applicant stated that, although there was no formal leakage monitoring in place, there had been no previous reported evidence of leakage from the former sand bed drains.

It seems unlikely that this statement is truthful. Put yourself in the shoes of the AmerGen workers dispatched to precondition the torus room in advance of the NRC team and speculate, for the moment, that AmerGen’s statement is somehow truthful. You get there and see water in a collection jug that has never contained water before (if we are somehow to buy this AmerGen yarn). Upon seeing water in a place that has never possessed water before, you toss it out without sampling or initiating a condition report on the first time discovery. Perhaps, but very unlikely.

But whether that was indeed the first time water ever moistened those jugs or not, NRC’s repeated instructions to licensees not to precondition equipment prior to testing and inspections should have prevented those AmerGen workers from emptying the jugs. For example, on April 25, 1996, the NRC issued Information Notice 96-24, “Preconditioning of Molded-Case Circuit Breakers before Surveillance Testing,” that clearly defined this NRC expectation:

Periodic inspection and testing of circuit breakers in their as-found condition is an appropriate way of demonstrating the functional operability of the breaker and of detecting any degradation. However, the practice of preconditioning before testing (e.g., lubricating pivot points and manually cycling the breaker) defeats the purpose of the periodic test.

While this NRC expectation specifically focused on electrical circuit breakers, it shouldn't take a rocket scientist to understand that the practice of preconditions (i.e., dumping water from collection jugs) also defeats the purpose of periodic inspections.

There have been numerous NRC warnings against preconditioning. NRC Information Notice 97-16, "Preconditioning of Plant Structures, Systems, and Components Before ASME Code Inservice Testing or Technical Specification Surveillance Testing," dated April 4, 1997, is another of the many examples. Via this document, the NRC warned its licensees:

In recent years, inspection findings and notices of violation have revealed that licensees are performing unacceptable preconditioning activities.

It is abundantly apparent that the AmerGen scrub team got to the torus room and took steps to "precondition" the area, thus defeating the purpose of the subsequent NRC team's efforts.

Given this documented example of AmerGen violating longstanding NRC policies of not preconditioning equipment prior to tests and inspections, can the NRC and the public have any confidence whatsoever in any of the results from this NRC inspection? After all, perhaps AmerGen's sweepers in the other areas examined by the NRC team did a better job of not getting caught than the torus room gang.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David O. Lochbaum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Lochbaum
Director, Nuclear Safety Project