GSU faces fine for violations of safety rules at River Bend

By STEVE CULPEPPER
Baker-Zachary bureau

Gulf States Utilities Co. was told Thursday that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission apparently will level a $65,000 fine against GSU for violations of NRC security rules at the company's River Bend nuclear power plant, GSU and the NRC announced Friday.

The Level III violation follows five severity Level IV security violations called against GSU by the NRC earlier in the year. GSU was notified of the Level III NRC violations Thursday, NRC spokesman Clyde Wisner said.

Level I is the most serious of five violation categories set up by the NRC. The categories range downward to Level V, the least serious.

GSU spokesman Bill Benedettosaid the civil fine, which could have been as high as $135,000, was cut in half because of what he said NRC officials called GSU's "prompt and extensive corrective actions."

In NRC Region IV Administrator Robert D. Martin's letter to GSU, Martin said: "These violations demonstrate deficiencies in management's ability to exercise effective personnel access control and failure of management to recognize and correct plant design deficiencies as they related to implementation of the security program."

"Any violation we consider to be serious," Wisner said. "But we don't usually propose a civil penalty unless it is Level III," he said.

"GSU was cited for one alleged violation without a proposed civil penalty for failure to promptly report to the NRC a major loss of security effectiveness," Wisner said.

"We could have proposed a penalty of $130,000, but we mitigated that to $65,000" because GSU has noted the problems and has assured the agency, they will not recur, Wisner said.

According to the NRC spokesman, the security violations were verified during NRC inspections Feb. 25, March 31-April 2 and May 2 at the River Bend plant.

Violations include the incorrect deactivation of an auxiliary building access control system by security personnel, which allowed one unauthorized person to enter the building, Wisner said.

In the NRC's Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance issued in May, the commission gave GSU a grade of 2 in its security performance. There are three categories of performance and category 2 means the NRC attention to a given area should be maintained.

According to the SALP report, five NRC inspections were made of River Bend during the first nine months of its inspection period that ran from Jan. 1, 1985, through Jan. 31, 1986.

Five violations were identified in that report:

- Failure to make timely notification of a reportable event, which carried a Level IV violation.
- Failure to properly control master keys, which carried a Level IV violation.
- Failure to meet security plan requirement in fence height, which also carried a level IV violation.
- Failure to provide proper escort, which carried a severity Level IV NRC violation.
- Failure to control badge key cards, which carried a Level IV violation.
- Other violations included improperly removing a hatch cover, allowing improper access to normally secured areas, failure to secure a vital area door and improperly removing a large concrete floor that normally secured a vital area, Wisner said.

Security personnel were not assigned to guard test areas while the barriers were "compromised," Wisner said. Also included in the violations were two areas where inadequate physical barriers were provided.

NRC regulations prohibit disclosure of details about a nuclear plant's security system, Wisner said.

"During a meeting in June 1986, GSU assured Region IV staff that they had implemented adequate security measures to properly secure all vital areas and are taking steps to assure security problems do not go undetected in the future," Wisner said.

GSU officials emphasized that the security violations involved certain areas within the plant itself and that there were no problems identified with the security system that keeps unauthorized persons from gaining access to the plant, Benedetto said.

"Our first line of security was in place at all times," he said. "Which means that no unauthorized person would have been inside the plant."

Benedetto said that on its last "report card" from the NRC, the commission commended GSU because "corporate and site management attention and security actions are strong and responsive to NRC initiatives."

"In view of GSU's past performance and the 'prompt and extensive actions,' the company will ask the NRC to further reduce or waive the civil penalties," Benedetto said.

He said GSU staff "detected the security problems on its own and immediately began taking corrective action while informing the NRC."

"While we view all security violations with great concern, it should be pointed out that these are the kinds of problems that occur as a plant makes the transition from construction to operation," Benedetto said.

GSU has 30 days to either pay the penalty or object, Wisner said. If GSU objects, which Benedetto said it will, the NRC will review the objections.

"And if we feel the violations are still in order, then we will issue an order to GSU to pay the penalty," Wisner said.

"If they still disagree, they have the right to request a hearing," Wisner said.

In the NRC's Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance issued in May, the commission gave GSU a grade of 2 on its security performance. There are three categories of performance and category 2 means the NRC attention to a given area should be maintained.

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Five violations were identified in that report:

- Failure to provide proper escort, which carried a severity Level IV NRC violation.
- Failure to control badge key cards, which carried a Level IV violation.
- Failure to make timely notification of a reportable event, which carried a level IV violation.
- Failure to properly control master keys, which carried a Level IV violation.
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