NRC reviews River Bend deficiency report

By BOB ANDERSON
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Deficiencies in construction at the River Bend nuclear power plant indicate “a need for more intense management attention,” but do not show a pervasive breakdown in construction controls, a federal construction team reports.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said it is reviewing “a list of potential enforcement actions” based on the inspection and will be following the corrective action taken by Gulf States Utilities.

“The deficiencies identified included examples of inadequate hardware inspection and examples of inadequate quality assurance and engineering review of deficiencies for generic application,” NRC said in a letter to GSU.

Inspection of structural steel showed that materials and work was generally acceptable, though two problems were identified, NRC said.

“A significant number of high strength bolts in the reactor building structural steel connections were found to be below minimum torque values,” the inspectors also reported.

GSU began providing “appropriate management attention” to the problem areas pointed out by the NRC team before the team ever left the site, said Tom Crouse, manager of quality assurance for GSU.

He said the report “compares very favorably” with the seven other inspections conducted by the 16-member team at other nuclear power plant construction sites.

NRC said it also found evidence that the company is employing good construction practices, such as quality accountability meetings to install the need for quality craftsmanship at the site.

While the team determined that River Bend’s construction is “generally in accordance with requirements, commitments and principles of prudent management,” it also identified the following “construction program weaknesses:”

• Implementation of procedural engineering requirements were not consistently met in control of hydrogen producing materials and some other areas.

• Several discrepancies were identified concerning film of welds supplied by a piping vendor, the team’s report said.

• GSU should review additional film in order to assure that discrepancies identified by both the applicant and the NRC constitute isolated cases,” the team said.

River Bend is being constructed near St. Francisville and is planned as a base-load plant for the GSU system. The company projects that the $3 billion plant will go into service late next year.