Duke, NRC discuss fire plan

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Duke Energy officials are "hopeful" after presenting more information to representatives of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding the fire protection plan at the Oconee Nuclear Station.

The NRC is likely to announce by the end of the month what penalties, if any, will be imposed on Duke for failing to meet a Dec. 31, 2012, deadline for complete implementation of the fire protection plan.

Duke spokeswoman B.J. Gatten said Wednesday's meeting was an opportunity for Duke officials to give "more technical details" on Duke's timeline to complete the fire protection project at the Oconee plant.

"We feel good about the schedule we've given to the NRC," said Gatten. "We're hopeful."

Roger Hannah, a NRC spokesman, said the schedule for completing the project is important to the regulatory agency. He added the penalties against Duke could include a letter with parameters of a timeline for completing the project.

"Ultimately, we want to make sure the project is completed," said Hannah. "We don't want to place unreasonable expectations, but we do want to make sure they meet the requirements."

The Oconee site and the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant near Raleigh, N.C., were involved in a pilot project to meet new fire regulations. Duke had agreed to complete its changes by Dec. 31, 2012. In July, Duke asked for a two-year extension of the deadline, which was denied in a Jan. 15 letter from the NRC. The Oconee Nuclear Station is currently out of compliance with the NRC.

The Oconee plant was notified of an "apparent violation" for not meeting the deadline and representatives met with NRC officials March 5 to present their case in person at a Predecisional Enforcement Conference.

Duke and NRC officials have said the Oconee plant is currently safe. But, Duke could face penalties of up to $140,000 per day for each of the three reactors until the fire protection plan is completed.

Duke officials also met with the NRC on Tuesday to discuss details of the plans to deal with potential flooding at the plant and in the community in the unlikely event of a failure of the Jocassee Dam. Hannah said that discussion is part of an ongoing dialogue about the efforts Duke is making and the plant is not in violation.

ncannada@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684
Follow on Twitter: | @NormCannada