Duke officials to meet with feds

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SENECA — Duke Energy officials will meet with representatives of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) March 5 to discuss issues related to the Oconee Nuclear Station's failure to meet a Dec. 31 deadline to update a fire safety plan.

Duke spokeswoman Sandra Magee said the March 5 Predecisional Enforcement Conference will be held at the NRC headquarters in Rockville, Md. She said Oconee officials attending the conference would likely include Preston Gillespie, site vice president, and Jim Fuller, general manager for the installation of the Protected Service Water (PSW) system.

Duke asked for the conference after a Jan. 31 letter from the NRC saying the Oconee plant "is being considered for escalated enforcement action." The letter said the commission will consider civil penalties against Duke. Oconee officials were given the option of a face-to-face conference or a written response.

"We will be giving them more information," Magee said of the upcoming meeting.

The Oconee site and the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant near Raleigh, N.C. are 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, and is currently out of compliance.

Magee said in January the biggest project left is the installation of a new Protected Service Water system, which will provide protection for all three reactors. She estimated the system would be completed within 24 months.

In the Jan. 31 letter, Michele Evans, director of the NRC's division of Operator Reactor Licensing, wrote that because of the denial of the extension for the Oconee plant, "Duke appears to be in violation in all three units."

Gillespie told community leaders last week that the Oconee plant had put measures in place to ensure fire safety until the project is completed.

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