Feds: Duke operated safely in 2012

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Although the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is considering penalties against Duke Energy's Oconee Nuclear Station, the commission said the Oconee plant operated safely in 2012.

NRC officials held an open house Thursday night to discuss the annual assessment of the nuclear station. Roger Hannah, an NRC spokesman, said no violations were found during 2012 that will change the oversight status of the Oconee plant, which is located near Seneca.

Hannah said Duke scored in the "green" range on all performance indicators, which means there were no violations found significant enough to require additional inspections. He said the report indicates the Oconee Nuclear Station operated safely in 2012.

Duke was notified earlier this year of an "apparent violation" for failing to meet a deadline for full implementation of a new fire safety plan.

That assessment could change in 2013. Duke was notified earlier this year of an "apparent violation" for failing to meet a deadline for full implementation of a new fire safety plan.

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 its 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.

Hannah said a final decision on any penalties is expected by mid-June.

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