NRC: Duke's performance 'satisfactory'

BY GAVIN OLIVER
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SENECA — Oconee Nuclear Station site vice president Scott Batson said Thursday he knows the facility wouldn't be in operation if it wasn't for the compliance of local residents, so he prioritizes the safety of those people and others in the community.

According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Batson and others at the plant are keeping their word.

NRC and Duke Energy officials presented the plant's 2013 performance summary Thursday at an event open to the public. The officials reported the nuclear station scored green on 13 indicators — the best outcome on the NRC's four-color scale — leading to an overall "satisfactory" designation.

"This plant has all green for 2013," said Gerald McCoy, chief of the NRC's region II projects branch. "So it's acceptable and in what we call the 'complacency response column,' which

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Scott Batson
Oconee Nuclear Station site vice president

DUKE: Gets green on indicators

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means we inspect their normal operations. We inspect their plant operations. We have no plant follow-up inspections."

The inspections that earned Duke the satisfactory tag occur on a thorough and extended basis.

On staff at the plant are three inspectors who live in the area and work 40 hours a week, while three other inspectors make the trek from Atlanta for "specialist" inspections that cover a range of categories including radiological inspections, welding specialists and piping and mechanical specialists.

Batson said Duke has kept an especially keen eye on fire safety after volunteering for a new Nuclear Facilities Design Authority policy that "is a risk-based approach" to safety, focusing on dialing up the facilities through modifications of the plant that has and will continue to aid an improving "safety margin."

Because of the modifications already wrapped up, Duke has witnessed a 15-percent improvement in safety that could top out at 30 percent," Batson said.

"We operate these facilities because the communities around us allow us to do that," Batson said. "So that's very important to us that we continue to operate the facilities in a safe manner to ensure that we maintain the confidence of those that live around our facility."