

# NRC: Oconee Nuclear safe, but still on radar

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SENECA — Oconee Nuclear Station may be off the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's watch list after 18,000 hours of inspections last year, but the facility is still on the NRC's radar.

This week's annual assessment of Oconee Nuclear operations by the NRC reiterated the firm's placement, for most of 2010, on the agency's "yellow" threshold. The rating indicates a "significant" safety performance issue.

NRC onsite inspector Andy Sabisch said the yellow finding stemmed from water flow problems in a back-up cooling system that rendered the system inoperable for all

three reactors for more than a year.

As a result, the NRC conducted additional oversight of ONS in 2010 and, after a December inspection found all issues resolved, removed the facility from the "yellow" category.

Federal regulators referred to the year as "unique" during this week's assessment.

Duke's Site Vice President Preston Gillespie called it a "gut check." "I, personally, asked myself a thousand times 'How did we end up here?'" Gillespie told a gathering of about four-dozen people, most of whom live near the plant.

"It's no fun being yellow. There was tons of

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**Preston Gillespie**  
Oconee Nuclear Station Site Vice President



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discussion over the yellow finding," he continued. "We are not happy we ended up in a degraded cornerstone (status). It's not who we are."

In response to a question, Preston said the water line in question would never have been part of a first response but could have been a second or third line response depending on the type of "event" that would have required its use. The system has not been used in the plant's 40 years of operation.

NRC officials reported that, while Duke had

addressed the underlying issues that led to the yellow finding, the firm had failed to do the same thing related to four separate violations for which the "underlying cause was human error in failure to follow operating procedures."

As a result, the NRC determined that there was a Significant Cross Cutting Issue that will, according to Deputy Director of Regional Projects Bill Jones, result in ongoing additional oversight throughout 2011.

Duke spokesperson Sandra Magee said Duke has already begun addressing the issue of

employee performance.

"We have addressed technical areas and we are now focused on administrative procedures," she said. "We are already seeing improvement in terms of behaviors associated with operating procedures."

Magee said the four violations cited by NRC were diverse — ranging from fire brigade performance to how rebar was being handled in the pouring of concrete — but centered largely around the ongoing construction of a protected service water system.