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SENECA—A \$2 billion package of safety upgrades should give Oconee Nuclear Station a jump on coming requirements for the nation's nuclear power plants, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission official said Wednesday.

Projects planned years before a March 11 earthquake and tsunami crippled Japan's Fukushima Dai-ichi plant give Oconee a head start, said Victor McCree, NRC regional administrator.

"The work is adding safety margins," McCree said.

Although Duke Energy's nearly completed list of projects to prepare the relicensed plant for its next 20 years is unrelated to recommendations by a post-Fukushima task force for new protections, there's overlap, McCree said.

"It's likely that Oconee and Duke will be able to take credit for the enhancements it is making in response to Fukushima," McCree told GreenvilleOnline.com.

Projects include a digital conversion of control room safety systems, enhanced protection against tornadoes, high winds, fire, pressurized steam line breaks and flooding.

"Fukushima validated decisions (Duke) made nearly 10 years ago," said Preston Gillespie, site vice president at Oconee. "It's really fortunate for us that we got started early."

NRC officials were at Oconee on Wednesday for an update on the projects.

The digital conversion of the Unit 1 control room last June was the nation's first and has been problem-free since going into operation, Gillespie said.

Extensive advance planning paid off, Gillespie said.

The digital system was installed in a training facility for about three years and bugs were worked out during that time, and the new system is more reliable and easier for operators to use than the old analog system, Gillespie said.

The Unit 3 control room safety

Oconee upgrades consider new rules

Nuke plant work will increase safety

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systems will be converted in the spring, and Unit 2 will be converted next year, said Scott Lynch, general manager of Oconee Major Projects, who gave details of the upgrade progress and plans to the NRC.

A "huge effort" to further protect against natural forces such as tornadoes and high winds is done, Lynch said.

More than 618 tons of structural steel, 450 cubic

yards of concrete and 70 tons of rebar are in place, and about 11,300 square feet of a polymer-based resin fabric is wrapped over some brick walls, he said.

A protected service water system to back up the station's standby shutdown facility is almost complete, and changes to reduce fire risk have been implemented, Lynch said.

Major work ahead includes addition of main steam isolation valves to add protection if a high pressure steam line breaks, Lynch said.

Meanwhile, McCree

said the NRC is moving forward on the Fukushima task force recommendations.

A draft letter recently sent to Oconee and all of the nation's operating nuclear power plants asks for details on testing of nozzles, hoses and other equipment for firefighting and spent fuel pool protection, communication devices such as radios and satellite phones, and vehicles to move portable emergency pumps.

The letter also asks for details on agreements with emergency support agencies such as law enforce-

ment, fire departments and local hospitals.

Sandra Magee, a Duke spokeswoman, said the additional details requested will be provided to the agency, including information on testing and frequency of testing of equipment.

Oconee has agreements with local and state emergency response agencies and hospitals and has "a very strong emergency response plan," Magee said.

"We routinely test our emergency plan through planned emergency drills with these agencies participating."

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