More Inspections Planned to Ensure Nuke Plant Safety

SOUTH HAVEN, Mich. (AP) — More work and hundreds of hours of additional inspections are planned over the coming year to help continue improving safety at the Palisades nuclear plant in southwestern Michigan, officials said.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said last week the plant in Van Buren County's Covert Township operated safely in 2012. NRC staff members discussed their assessment of the plant's performance during a public meeting Tuesday night in South Haven.

"It's fair to say we expect more effort and more work done in safety culture," said Jack Geissner, a district branch chief with the NRC.

More than 100 people turned out for the meeting, with some voicing concerns and asking questions about the facility, the Kalamazoo Gazette and WOOD-TV reported. Representatives of New Orleans-based Entergy Corp., which owns the plant, also attended.

"We have improved our performance at Palisades and we remain on an improving trend today because we focused specifically on safety — the safety of the public and the safety of our employees," said Palisades Vice President Tony Vitale. "But we recognize we have a lot more work to do."

The NRC plans to continue the normal 2,000 hours of inspections and will conduct an additional 1,000 hours of inspections over the next year.

The agency downgraded the plant's status last year because of safety violations in 2011. Officials have said problems have been cleared up, but concerns remain in the area.

Bette Pierman, a member of Michigan Safe Energy Future who lives 12 miles from the plant, said she was dissatisfied with the NRC's assessment and hasn't felt safe living near the plant.

"I am extremely frustrated because there are just a lot of issues at the plant that are not protecting the people and environment," Pierman said.

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