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## Officials talk NFS safety

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ERWIN — Nuclear Fuel Services' general manager on Thursday said the company needs to get better in all components of the plant but said the company is taking steps to improve safety.

A recent review by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that examined activities at the plant from July 29 until Dec. 31 showed a need for better management oversight in facility support and licensing activities.

The federal agency said it had "noted an upward trend in the number of procedural violations identified during this review period. This increase in violations appears to be an indicator of declining regulatory performance in this area."

NRC Acting Regional Administrator Victor McCree said facility support is a component that has long been an area of concern for the NRC at NFS. He said at least one of the violations was a lack of adherence to corrective measures put in place in the wake of a March 6, 2006, spill of 35 liters of highly-enriched uranium.

At a meeting Thursday between the NRC and the company, NFS General Manager Tim Lindstrom highlighted the safety culture strategic plan for the plant.

"Since we last met, we have completed development of that plan and begun implementation," he said. "We think that elements of that plan address all of the elements that were identified by the NRC as well as elements that have been identified by an independent group of nuclear safety experts who have done an assessment of NFS."

Lindstrom said NFS recently promoted John Nagy to vice president and chief nuclear safety officer. He is in charge of overseeing regulatory safety and licensing activities. Lindstrom called Nagy an "independent watchdog" on the staff.

Lindstrom also cited the promotion of Gene Athon to vice president for applied technology.

"Gene's background is in operation of our fuel facility, which has had a long tradition and reputation of formality, discipline and accountability," Lindstrom said. "Gene is bringing those attributes and skills into the engineering department to ensure that we bring forth some of these changes with that same level of accountability."

Addressing the NRC findings, Lindstrom said NFS believes it needs to improve in all aspects of this operation. He said excellence is the objective and the company is not satisfied with its performance in any facet.

Referring to facility support, he said the eight violations are “unacceptable.” As a response, he said NFS has in the short term increased supervisory and management observation and reporting and seen improvements in this area.

“We require our managers and supervisors to report all problems that they see,” Lindstrom said. “We’ve seen an increased reporting and corrections of very low-level problems, which we feel is important in developing a culture where all problems are reported and corrected.”

The NRC also concluded that NFS had supplied inadequate information in multiple license amendment requests, including a recently approved proposal to increase the amount of highly-enriched uranium it can possess in the plant.

Lindstrom said NFS was “a bit surprised” to see this area cited as a weakness. He said the company will continue to work with NRC management to understand the federal agency’s expectations.

“We were not aware that our submittals were not up to the quality expected,” he said.