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Physicians Group Requests Evaluation of Point Beach Nuclear Reactor Shutdown

Physicians for Social Responsibility Wisconsin (PSR WI) is requesting the Nuclear Regulatory Commission send an Augmented Inspection Team to Point Beach Nuclear Reactor, Unit 1 to evaluate the root causes of a July 31, 2021, reactor trip (also called Scram).

August 10, 2021 – Two Rivers, WI – On July 31, 2021, Point Beach Nuclear Reactor Unit 1 was scrammed due to mechanical failures. The [NRC defines Scram](#) as "the sudden shutting down of a nuclear reactor, usually by rapid insertion of control rods, either automatically or manually by the reactor operator. Also known as a "reactor trip"." PSR WI is requesting further investigation of the events leading up to and after the Scram at Point Beach Nuclear Reactor, Unit 1 and send a formal request to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on August 6, 2021.

After a review of the [Event Report 55390](#) and the [report](#) from PSR WI's expert, Arnold Gunderson, PSR WI views this Scram as a failure to adequately monitor and maintain the aging and outmoded components within the Point Beach reactor units, which is currently 50 years old and was built for a 40 year operating life.

"These recent failures at Point Beach prove that, unlike wine, nuclear plants do not improve as they age. Sooner or later, in any foolproof system, the fools are going to exceed the proofs," remarked Gunderson.

Ann Behrmann, MD, PSR WI Treasurer, said, "PSR WI is thankful that the operators of the Point Beach Unit 1 were able perform operations successfully to manually shut this reactor down emergently and, we presume, without excess radiation exhausted into the atmosphere of neighboring communities or into Lake Michigan. But as a pediatrician, I understand that accident prevention should not be the responsibility of the operator, but that adequate engineering failsafe mechanisms work as designed."

PSR WI's understanding of the review of the sequence of events on July 31 is as follows, one of two feedwater pumps failed while operating at full power. When that pump failed, it created following events that caused only half of the required cooling water to enter the reactor. Thus, the reactor could not be cooled as it was engineered and constructed to be.

Then, control circuitry that is supposed to cause the reactor to reduce its power automatically failed to function, and reactor operators had to intervene to manually Scram (shut down) the

reactor. This stopped the ongoing chain reaction in the reactor, but the decay heat from the reactor continued to emanate.

Typically, the 170,000 horsepower of decay heat would be sent to the condenser and discharged into Lake Michigan for cooling in such an unexpected event. However, a critical valve called the Condenser Steam Dump Valve became stuck in a partially open/partially closed position. As a result, operators had to manually intervene to close other valves.

A Feed Regulating Valve should have automatically taken control if the previously mentioned valve failed and sent the excess waste heat to the condenser via an alternate route. Unfortunately, this valve, which was engineered to work automatically, failed to operate. Therefore, operators had to manually intervene by taking control of the computer system.

Thus, rather than cooling the Point Beach reactor by sending its waste heat into the condenser and then into Lake Michigan, the 170,000 horsepower of waste heat was dumped directly into the atmosphere through what the nuclear industry calls an atmospheric dump via a large pipe that exhausts hot steam directly into the environment. Since it appears that there are no leaks in the Point Beach steam generator, Point Beach claims that this atmospheric dump is not radioactive.

PSR WI urgently requests the NRC to send an Augmented Inspection Team to Point Beach Nuclear Reactor, Unit 1 to evaluate the root causes of the Scram. The July 31 event contains several troubling signs that aging equipment and/or questionable maintenance practices might cause a mishap at Point Beach, and PSR WI is requesting that this inspection be undertaken quickly. PSR WI is further requesting that the complete results and findings of the inspection team be made available and easily accessible in a timely manner to the public.

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Physicians for Social Responsibility Wisconsin (PSR WI) is an organization of health professionals and other concerned individuals who work to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. We seek to prevent nuclear war, to reverse our climate change trajectory and to stop further contamination of our environment.