

Nukewatch

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Wisconsin's nuclear power reactors at Point Beach are located on Lake Michigan. They have suffered frequent unplanned shutdowns caused by accidents, resulting in official warnings, fines, and even criminal convictions. If a company wants to continue to create tons of high level radioactive waste, they need to prove that they will be doing something different so that none of these accidents will happen again.

As of 2008 three "RED" findings — the highest failure warning issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) — had ever been made public.

At issue were safety procedures that were declared "inadequate" by NRC inspectors who said the failures existed "for many years and that the licensee had seven prior opportunities to identify these inadequacies." The failures and inaction were of "high safety significance (a Red finding)" under NRC rules. NRC inspectors found that Point Beach's owners continuously compromised the auxiliary [cooling] feed-water pumps between 2001 and 2007.

January 15, 2008

At Point Beach's Unit 1, an "Unusual Event" emergency was prompted by the complete loss of all offsite electric power to essential buses for more than 15 minutes, mandating a notification of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. A supply breaker opened "for unknown reasons," was being investigated and preparations were made for a Unit 1 shutdown. — NRC Event No. 43907, Jan. 15, 2008

December 8, 2006

At Point Beach, the Control Room Emergency Filtration System was declared inoperable. The Control Room Charcoal Filter Fan tripped during a surveillance test, an event or condition that could have prevented the filter's performance during a contamination emergency or, in the NRC's words, "could have prevented fulfillment of a safety function." — NRC Event No. 43040, Dec. 8, 2006

August 22, 2006

In an August 22, 2006 letter to Point Beach, the NRC charged that a senior reactor operator was discriminated against by the company's management for identifying potential technical violations. The discrimination was an apparent violation of employee protection requirements. — NRC, "Point Beach Summary," Inspection Procedure 95002, <nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/degraded-cornerstone/pt-beach-summary.html>

December 16, 2005

Point Beach paid a \$60,000 fine imposed Jan. 13, 2006 after two workers "deliberately provided NRC inspectors with inaccurate information" about the critique of an emergency preparedness drill at the Point Beach reactor in August 2002. The two were fired, and one was convicted in federal court of knowingly making false written statements to the NRC. — NRC News, No. III-05-046, Dec. 19, 2005

December 13, 2005

A manual reactor trip shut down Point Beach Unit 1, due to loss of a condenser vacuum caused by failure of the running circulating water pump. Decay heat was being removed by "atmospheric dump valves." The backup feed-water system was required. The operator, Florida Power & Light, said there are no known steam generator tube leak issues. — Notification to NRC, Dec. 13, 2005

November 9, 2004

While operating at 100 percent power, Point Beach Unit 2 sprang a steam leak from a valve in the main steam flow transmitter. The leak of potentially contaminated steam forced an unplanned shutdown. The leak involved what is called "containment penetration" of the main steam line passing through the concrete containment building. Accordingly, operators declared a Technical Specification Condition "not met," forcing operators to isolate the "affected penetration flow path with a completion time of 72 hours." Operators were unable to meet the allowed completion time for this task. — NRC Event No. 41212, Notification, Nov. 19, 2004

April 8, 2004

Point Beach paid a \$60,000 fine imposed March 20, for last summer's problems with the reactor's backup cooling pumps. — *The Capital Times*, March 20, 2004

February 11, 2004

The ongoing risk of a breakdown in Point Beach's cooling feed-water pumps results in a NRC "RED" finding, the agency's most severe safety failure warning. — NRC News, Feb. 11, 2004

October 2002

A "RED" finding was issued by the NRC against Point Beach for problems with cold water circulation for cooling the reactor. — NRC News, Feb. 11, 2004

November 18, 1997

Point Beach Unit 2 was hastily shut down because of electrical problems. — *Milwaukee Jrnl Sntl*, Nov. 18, 1997

August 12, 1997

The NRC recorded 21 violations at Point Beach in the 90-day period between Dec. 1996 and Feb. 1997. — *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Aug. 12, 1997

July 25, 1997

Reactor 2 at Point Beach was shutdown when a cooling water pump failed. — *Milwaukee Jrnl Sntl*, Aug. 25, 1997

February 18, 1997

Reactor 1 at Point Beach was shut down when a cooling water pump defect required the pump's replacement.

December 1996

Point Beach owner WEPCO was fined \$325,000 for 16 safety violations and a 1996 explosion inside a loaded high-level waste cask. The NRC said WEPCO was "inattentive to their duties," "starting up a power unit while one of its safety systems was inoperable," and had failed to install "the required number of cooling pumps." — *Milwaukee Jrnl Sntl*, Aug. 12, 1997, and Dec. 5, 1996

May 28, 1996

At Point Beach, a potentially catastrophic explosion of hydrogen gas, "powerful enough to up-end the three-ton lid," pushed aside a 6,390-pound cask lid while it was atop a storage cask filled with high-level waste. The lid was being robotically welded to the cask. — *Milwaukee Jrnl Sntl*, June 8, 1995

March 30, 1995

A Point Beach reactor was shut down due to instrument failure in the emergency generator system used to circulate cooling water when regular power is cut off during emergencies. — *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 30, 1995

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