

[Security Problems at Three NJ Nuclear Plants](#)

Posted: 07 Oct 2012 02:58 PM PDT



By Roger Witherspoon

Federal regulators, after six months of intensive examination, have found serious deficiencies and violations of law in the security at three of New Jersey's four nuclear power plants.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspectors found the deficiencies at the Hope Creek and Salem 1 and 2 reactors operated by PSEG Nuclear following a series of inspections that began in December, 2011, and formally concluded August 27, 2012.

The NRC initially notified PSEG in a Dec. 19, 2011 letter to Thomas Joyce, the firm's President and Chief Nuclear Officer, of multiple security performance problems at the three-plant site on Artificial Island in the Delaware Bay. That notification began a process in which PSEG was able to explain its actions and appeal the findings. The federal agency then notified the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Environmental Safety and Health of the defective security. DEP then assigned State inspectors to join their NRC counterparts evaluating the security issues at the three nuclear plants.

On Feb. 6, 2012, PSEG explained their security operation at a meeting with federal and state officials. But that meeting did not result in an exoneration of the company's efforts to protect the plants from sabotage. In a March 20 letter to Joyce, the NRC's Director of its Division of Security Operations, Patricia Holahan, stated that PSEG's staff had "failed to conduct an adequate effectiveness review."

In addition, Holahan presented a formal "Notice of Violation" of federal laws governing security at nuclear installations. The violations, she wrote, would trigger "escalated enforcement action" against the company.

Details of the problems at the nuclear installation are secret, with the public information revealing only the multiple "degraded cornerstones". But NRC Regional Director William Dean, in a September 4 letter to Joyce, said the plants would be subject to an extensive series of inspections to determine:

- If the company actually understands the "root and contributing causes" of the various security failings.
- If the factors that contributed to the cited violations could have set the stage for other violations which may not yet have been

discovered.

- If the corrective actions undertaken by PSEG are sufficient to prevent future failures.

Feeling the Blues

The NRC has a four-color coded system to rank its plant operations, going from green to white to yellow to red, with green being the best run plant operation and red being the worst. The agency won't say what the ranking is for Hope Creek and Salem 1&2, but give the site a "blue" rating, which means there are multiple "degraded cornerstones." The blue grade is worse than green, but how much worse is not made public.



The secrecy surrounding security at nuclear installations also prevents the public from knowing precisely what was wrong at Hope Creek or Salem. There are, however, three major areas which are subject to review. These include:

- Force-on-force drills, in which there is a simulated "attack" on the plant by a group of "terrorists." These exercises have been criticized because the NRC limits the types of weapons to light armaments and the number of terrorists to five, asserting that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by four separate groups, rather than a coordinated strike by 20 men. Many of these invaders have succeeded in reaching critical areas, even though the plant guards know in advance when the attacks are coming.
- Computer systems, which control much of the operation of the plant and its most critical systems are to be protected from hacker attacks.
- Restricted access: Only specially designated workers at a nuclear plant are allowed to go into certain critical areas, such as the control room.

The failings cited by the NRC may fall into any of those three categories, combinations of two of them, or all three. It is also not publicly revealed if the security issues were systemic and affect each of the three plants equally, or if there were different combinations of security problems at each site.

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said in a statement that "our inspectors have identified a security issue at the site that warrants additional oversight. We don't go into details of how we arrived at the decision because that could point would-be adversaries to potential vulnerabilities."

Sheehan said security inspections generally evolve from issues uncovered during the force-on-force drills. "Plant owners generally try to have the problems addressed as quickly as possible, and it is up to them to let us know when they are ready for us to come back and examine them again.

"In this case we have done inspections and found that they were not, in fact, ready with corrective actions, and then we had to go back and do another team inspection to determine why."

Plants generally have one year to bring their facilities into compliance, Sheehan added. That would give PSEG a March, 2013 deadline to pass new security inspections. PSEG declined to comment beyond the written public record.

