

## Deficiencies found in existing welding work and soil backfill

# Stricter quality controls promised

HOUSTON — Consultants Houston Lighting & Power Co. hired to evaluate the South Texas Nuclear Project verified government charges of weak quality control, but an HL&P report made public Wednesday promised a reorganization — including near doubling of its on-site team — to eliminate deficiencies.

Consultants also told HL&P they found failures in soil backfill and welding work already completed. Evaluation of finished concrete work was incomplete. HL&P told the NRC every deficiency will be evaluated in consultation with contractor Brown & Root Inc., and the NRC. The utility promised faulty work would be torn out and repaired.

The information was part of HL&P's response to an NRC threat to stop work at the 5-year-old project, still six years from completion, four years behind schedule. The NRC earlier fined HL&P \$100,000 for violating NRC standards. The \$2.7 billion plant, 10 miles southwest of Bay City is being built for utilities in Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi and Austin.

The NRC has scheduled a public meeting Aug. 19 in Bay City to discuss HL&P's response. Pending NRC approval, safety-related concrete pouring, stopped since December, and safety-related welding, stopped since April, remain suspended — putting the project further behind schedule.

"These HL&P commitments, faithfully executed, provide assurance that the construction activities at STP are, and will be, conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, are consistent with the public health and

safety and, therefore, work should not be stopped," HL&P vice president George Oprea said.

The NRC ordered HL&P to consider several alternative quality control systems including the current system putting Brown & Root in charge, a system putting HL&P in charge and a third system turning quality control over to an outside consultant.

HL&P said in the report it had evaluated findings by consultant Bechtel Power Corp. and decided to retain the current system, putting Brown & Root in charge and HL&P in a supervisory capacity, although the companies outlined modifications touted as expanding HL&P's role and improving Brown & Root accountability.

HL&P said it will double its on-site quality assurance team from 25 people to 45. Brown & Root said it replaced its on-site quality assurance manager and several middle managers and canceled a quality inspector orientation that the NRC said over-emphasized the importance of cost and schedule.

Both companies said they had moved an additional level of management to the site and hired consultants to help improve quality control.

Bechtel warned, "No amount of corrective action to the individual findings will have a lasting effect unless HL&P management adopts and promulgates a 'quality first' philosophy, with only the safety of the work force having a higher priority... The quality functions of HL&P and B&R must be strengthened."

HL&P reported it created a task force, including outside consultants, to make NRC-required inspection of completed safety-related welding, including structural

and pipe welds. Although the study remained incomplete the team had found several failures in work already done.

HL&P said the task force reevaluated all weld X-rays and found 24 percent "unacceptable" because of improper documentation or flaws. The task force also ran tests on a random sample of 80 previously accepted welds and found 14 of 43 socket welds and seven of 35 pipe butt welds "unsatisfactory."

None of 14 uranium fuel rod control drive welds were found unsatisfactory.

In another evaluation the welding task force said it found 6 of 79 randomly selected structural steel welds contained "certain irregularities" and speculated "weld acceptance criteria were not always properly applied by some inspectors."

The report said: "All rejectable indications flaws in welds will be repaired and reinspected for final acceptance unless the welds are imbedded in concrete. In these cases an engineering evaluation will be performed to determine the necessity of repair."

HL&P reported consultants ran NRC-required tests of soil compaction under the plant and found four substandard areas, none directly under a nuclear plant building. The consultant said none of the weak areas was significant enough to require correction.

HL&P also reported it created a task force, including outside consultants, to make NRC-required study of completed safety-related concrete pours and although the evaluation was not complete said preliminary findings were "no deficiencies requiring repair work have been identified."

## Abortion suit overturned

AUSTIN — The Texas Supreme Court rejected the latest attempt Wednesday by right to life groups to overturn or circumvent earlier court decisions allowing abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy to be a matter decided by the woman and her physician.

The court, without written comment, upheld a Houston trial court decision that Eileen Brady, a mother of six affiliated with an anti-abortion group, had no legal standing to file a class action suit on behalf of an unborn child seeking an injunction preventing a woman identified as "Jane Doe" from having an abortion.

Brady first filed the suit as temporary guardian of the unborn child, but later amended it to a next-of-kin friend action on behalf of all unborn children in Texas.

The pregnant woman had called the Abortion Information Center, which was listed in the yellow pages and of the telephone directory under the "birth control" listing, seeking information about an abortion.

Within four days the unmarried 19-year-old was served with papers notifying her of Brady's suit to prevent her from having an abortion.

Brady did not know the pregnant

woman, and is not related to her. A Houston trial court dismissed the case and the woman had the abortion.

Joann Doughtie, attorney for "Jane Doe," said Wednesday she was delighted by the court decision but said the legal battle may not be over.

"They have been very persistent, so I wouldn't be surprised if they attempt some federal hearing on it," she said.

In her appeal to the state Supreme Court, Brady contended the court should have permitted her "next-of-kin" suit on behalf of the unborn child "in a case like this where the mothers, who should be the natural protectors of their unborn children, become their mortal enemies, and such unborn children are left defenseless and friendless for the protection of the rights and vital interests."

"In Texas, one who is charged

with the most heinous of crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Yet legally cognizable unborn human beings, blameless before the court, were left doomed to die at the hands of their 'mothers' and their abortionists."

The trial court had ruled Brady did not have legal standing to file suit as next-of-kin of an unborn child because an earlier U.S. Supreme Court decision had determined unborn children are not "persons" under the law.

The court also noted the Supreme Court decision in the earlier Texas case Roe vs. Wade made it clear abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy are a matter to be decided by a woman and her physician.

The Texas Supreme Court Wednesday upheld the lower court decisions in the Houston case without written comment.

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