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French Regulator Introduces Stricter Manufacturing Controls Following Le Creusot Problems

13 Jun 2018 : French nuclear regulator ASN has decided to strengthen its oversight of the production process of nuclear equipment and components as a result of the series of manufacturing irregularities, which were detected in 2015 at the Le Creusot forge in central France.

ASN said the new measures will include : (1) reinforcing provisions to be made by manufacturers and licensees, who retain the responsibility for the quality of manufacturing and of operations ; (2) employing external inspection organisations to support the oversight of manufacturing activities ; (3) improving ASN's inspection methods ; (4) requiring that any fraud detected by the licensee be systematically reported to ASN ; and (5) implementing of a system for collecting alerts from whistle-blowers.

In April 2015, following the discovery of what Areva (now Framatome) called "methodological discrepancies" in the performance of tensile tests carried out during manufacturing, Areva began a quality audit at the Le Creusot site.

Le Creusot is one of only a few facilities capable of producing the large forged parts required for nuclear power plants. Since the beginning of civil nuclear programmes in the 1970s, the facility has supplied some 3,000 forgings and castings for nuclear reactor coolant systems around the world.

In September 2017, state-controlled nuclear operator EDF said it had identified 471 anomaly reports during the review of 12 reactors equipped with components manufactured by Le Creusot.

Areva discovered separately that steel from Japan Casting and Forging Corporation might also have had carbon concentrations that could lead to anomalies.

The issue first came to attention in April 2015 when ASN confirmed an anomaly in the composition of steel in some areas of the lid and the bottom of the reactor pressure vessel at the Flamanville-3 EPR under construction in northern France.

ASN said these irregularities, which can be considered falsifications, could have significant safety implications related to reactor operation.

According to ASN, this situation showed that neither the robustness of the monitoring and inspection chain, nor the high level of quality demanded in the nuclear industry, were able to completely rule out the risk of counterfeit, suspect and fraudulent items.

In order to improve how these types of irregularities can be prevented and detected, ASN decided to assess how to strengthen the requirements applicable to the industry and improve its own oversight system.

ASN said manufacturers and other licensees will have time until 1 September 2018 to notify ASN on steps they have taken to implement the new regulatory measures.



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