

Nuclear agency ends increased oversight

Activists are, of course, disappointed,

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has discontinued its stepped-up oversight of the Salem and Hope Creek nuclear plants along the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, citing company progress in making work areas and managers more sensitive to safety issues.

In a letter sent to PSEG Nuclear on Thursday, NRC officials said an assessment report issued July 31 "documents our conclusion that you have made substantial progress" in improving the plant's work environment "and that programs are in place to sustain this progress."

The Salem-Hope Creek complex ranks as the nation's second-largest nuclear generating station. Federal officials ordered close scrutiny and extra inspections for the operation in late 2004 after complaints that managers ignored or discouraged safety warnings from workers and after a serious steam leak and breakdown.

"We would prefer that the NRC continue their oversight and not slack off," said Norm Cohen, who directs UNPLUG Salem, a group opposed to nuclear power. "This is not a surprise. I have my doubts. This is a pattern that's happened before. PSEG would have problems, they'd patch it together and a few months later, more problems."

Cohen said the plants should have to show years of consistent, safety-conscious performance before the NRC changes their status.

NRC representatives plan to discuss their decision to return the plants to regular supervision with the public on Sept. 14 at a site near the plant

The agency reported its decision as it released midyear assessments for all 103 nuclear power plants now operating in the United States.