

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

1991-03-21

Section: METRO

Edition: FINAL AM

Page: 5

Staff seeks leak that forced Comanche Peak shutdown

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Officials at Comanche Peak nuclear power plant continued to search late yesterday for a leak in a water system that cools steam that led to a plant shutdown. The shutdown, which occurred at 6:52 a.m. yesterday, is not considered an emergency and does not deal with the radioactive sections of the power plant, said George Hedrick, spokesman for plant owner TU Electric. The shutdown was the 19th since the plant opened last year. All shutdowns have involved maintenance reasons.

"The plant was shut down to find the cause and repair the leaks," Hedrick said. Officials will have a better idea of how long the plant must be shut down when they find the leak, he said. A spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said yesterday that the plant was shut down after sodium levels in water in the plant's non-nuclear portions rose too high.

Tests showed that water from Squaw Creek Reservoir, the plant's cooling pond, had mixed with the water used for steam to operate turbines, Hedrick said.

The steam is allowed to flow over the tubes holding water from the reservoir, to condense the water and recycle it through the turbine. The turbine water will need to be chemically cleaned to remove any impurities that entered from the leak. Impurities can cause deposits and corrosion in the turbine, Hedrick said.

The plant near Glen Rose provides electricity to many parts of Tarrant County.