

Fort Worth Star-Telegram  
1991-03-23  
Section: ARLINGTON  
Edition: ARLINGTON AM  
Page: 4

### **EPA tests water near nuclear facility**

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AUSTIN - Environmental Protection Agency representatives yesterday were investigating a report that 25 to 30 drums are submerged in Squaw Creek Reservoir near the Comanche Peak nuclear power plant outside Glen Rose. The 55-gallon drums were sighted more than five months ago by a recreational diver who notified environmental groups only recently.

The Squaw Creek Reservoir is a man-made lake used as a cooling source for Comanche Peak and is also a popular spot for recreational diving and fishing. TU Electric owns the plant, reservoir and surrounding parkland.

Travis Reed, a 19-year-old certified diver from Grand Prairie, found the drums submerged in 35 to 40 feet of water about 50 yards from the bank of the reservoir. Reed said he contacted EPA officials two or three days after the sighting in October, but received no response.

Rust spots and sediment covering the sealed drums indicated they had been submerged for some time, Reed said.

At least one drum was marked "Delta Petroleum Products," Reed said.

Darryl Thompson, a customer service and sales representative from Delta Petroleum Products in Grand Prairie, said the drums probably came from his company, which is a distributor of fuel and lubricating oil. He said the drums likely contained lubricating oil at one time.

"I can guarantee we had nothing to do with dumping the drums," Thompson said. Thompson said his company takes orders from TU Electric, providing turbine oil used in the plant's operation. Lubricating oil sold by the company generally is non-toxic or has a low level of toxicity, Thompson said. It sells for about \$220 per 55-gallon drum.

"Oil is not cheap. I don't know why anybody would want to throw away a full drum," he said. Thompson said the drums probably are empty.

EPA officials were testing the water quality in the reservoir near the drum sighting yesterday.

"If they've been there long enough and are covered pretty well by sediment, all the drums may have rusted through and leaked. Whatever damage there is has already been done," said Wally Cooper, the on-scene coordinator from the EPA's Dallas office.

"Chances are if they aren't ruptured, we'll have to remove them or they're going to rupture," Cooper said.

TU Electric officials said they do not know what is in the drums or who dumped them in the reservoir. They did not know the EPA team was at the reservoir.

"At this point the drums themselves are just an allegation," said TU spokesman Dick Ramsey. "This oil drum thing is news to us all. This is not something we would have knowingly condoned."

Brown and Root, the contractor building the \$10 billion Comanche Peak project, built seven industrial waste landfills near the reservoir. Two of the landfills were found to have contained a small amount of illegal hazardous waste, Ramsey said.

Some of the hazardous wastes that may have been buried in the landfills near the reservoir include paints and thinners used in Comanche Peak's construction.

"We are pumping the landfills out so there are no liquids left," Ramsey said. "We have been monitoring that water quality (in the reservoir) for years. We have not found any contamination from any source."

Texas Water Commission officials also said that recent tests performed by the agency showed no contamination in the reservoir water.

EPA spokesman Roger Meacham said the results of deep-water quality tests on the area of the reservoir where the drums were found will be released Monday.

He said there was no reason to inform TU officials about the test.

Meacham questioned why the diver who spotted the drums waited so long to report the drums to the EPA - even if he didn't receive any initial response from the agency.

"As far as him calling our office and not getting any response, we are checking our records on that," Meacham said. "It's kind of strange that he didn't call back if it was so important. This whole situation smacks of something else going on."

Meacham said it is not uncommon for the EPA to be called out to false alarms.

"We've had previous reports like this and they've been found to be nothing more than barrels used for flotation devices," Meacham said.

Squaw Creek Reservoir feeds into the Brazos River, which serves as a drinking water supply for communities south of Somervell County.

Valarie Billings, an engineer in the Texas Department of Health's water hygiene division, says water treatment plants downstream from the plant would remove most contaminants that might get into the water.