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### **Comanche Peak called No. 1 in safety violations**

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WASHINGTON - Comanche Peak is a "nuclear lemon" that leads the nation in safety violations but performs slightly better overall than other troubled nuclear plants, says a report released yesterday by a citizen watchdog group. The findings for the plant near Glen Rose, about 45 miles southwest of Fort Worth, reflect a myriad of start-up problems common to many new nuclear plants, say both the watchdog group Public Citizen and officials of TU Electric, which owns the plant.

But although the plant owners say the start-up problems have been routine and posed no threat to public safety, Public Citizen, led by consumer activist Ralph Nader, says they are a threat.

"We should never give a lot of slack to new plants just because they're new," said Ken Bossong, who directs the organization's Critical Mass Energy Project, which monitors safety at nuclear power plants nationwide.

He cited the Three Mile Island plant near Harrisburg, Pa., which had been operating for just six months in 1979 when it became the site of the worst nuclear plant disaster in U.S. history.

TU spokesman Dick Ramsey said the group has unfairly compared Comanche Peak with plants that have been operating for years. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, he said, recently gave the plant high marks on its first year in operation.

"They're just playing with numbers and making some unfair comparisons for a first-year plant, particularly a plant that has been put under a regulatory microscope," Ramsey said.

In the report, titled "Nuclear Lemons," Public Citizen ranked what it deemed to be the worst of the nation's 111 nuclear power plants in nine areas for a two-year period that ended in 1990.

It said Comanche Peak was cited by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission with 25 safety violations in 1989 and 14 violations in 1990, more than any other operating plant in the country during the two-year period.

The average of violations per reactor each year was 8.4. The second-greatest number occurred at the Fort Calhoun plant in Nebraska, which was cited with 17 violations during the period.

Ramsey said the report doesn't take into account that many of Comanche Peak's safety violations occurred while the plant was under construction. The NRC awarded the plant an operating license in February 1990.

Comanche Peak also had an unusually large number of emergency plant shutdowns, the group said. It was shut down six times, more than any other plant in the country except the South Texas power plant in Matagorda County, which had to be shut down 18 times.

When operation problems force a plant to shut down, the report says, it "is like suddenly slamming the brakes in a car - it is a sudden, violent stopping of a nuclear power plant."

Ramsey acknowledged that emergency shutdowns have been a problem but said Comanche Peak has had fewer on average than newer plants.

A TU study, he said, showed that Comanche Peak had 1.2 emergency shutdowns for every 1,000 hours of operation in 1990, compared with 2.1 shutdowns for every 1,000 hours at the 28 plants that have come on line since 1985.

All in all, he said, "We have not had a problem in the first year of operation of Comanche Peak with any public safety significance."

Public Citizen concluded that Comanche Peak performed poorly in five categories, but the group didn't cite the plant, as it did others, with dangerous radioactive releases, worker exposure to radiation or poor plant management.

The plant wasn't on the group's list of the 20 worst plants in the nation. Heading that list is the Brunswick II plant in Southport, N.C.