

TXU Shuts Down Glen Rose, Texas-Area Power Plant after Radioactive-Water Leak Dallas Morning News, The (TX), Dec 03, 2002

A tube carrying radioactive water was found to be leaking at TXU's Comanche Peak nuclear power plant in September, leading to a reactor shutdown and a federal inspection, according to government documents.

Radiation monitors inside the two-reactor plant's Unit 1 sounded alarms and recorded "high readings" Sept. 26, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspectors wrote in a report. Radiation levels inside the unit "spiked" six more times before operators shut down the reactor Sept. 28, the inspectors wrote.

A subsequent check by TXU found 667 other radioactive water-carrying tubes on Unit 1 that were corroded, but none was leaking, according to a company report to the NRC. That number represented more than 1 percent of the tubes that transfer the reactor's heat to steam generators, the company wrote.

TXU spokesman David Beshear said the plant's permit limits were not violated and the public was not endangered by the leak. The reactor was scheduled for refueling, so "they decided to shut down a few days early," he said.

Federal regulators launched an inspection of the shutdown Oct. 17 and plan to discuss the findings with TXU managers Dec. 10.

Members of the public will be allowed to observe the meeting at 1 p.m. at the plant, north of Glen Rose.

Comanche Peak is about 75 miles southwest of Dallas.

The inspection focused on the adequacy of Comanche Peak's system for finding and responding to such leaks, NRC spokesman Roger Hannah said. "They made a very conservative call to shut the plant down," he said. "What we're interested in is whether they should have picked up on this earlier."

The leak occurred in one of four steam generators that make steam to turn electric turbines. Small tubes carry water heated by the reactor's radioactive core into a heat exchange system. The system is designed to pass the reactor's heat, but not its radiation, into the water that makes the steam.

However, radiation can leak if a tube is cracked.

Previous inspections at Comanche Peak have found other corroded tubes but no leaks. Comanche Peak's Unit 1 received its full-power operating license in 1990. Unit 2 was licensed in 1993.

Corrosion of aging components at nuclear power plants has become a major public concern and an industry expense.

Reducing corrosion is one reason for planned changes in the type of nuclear fuel that the plant uses and in the repair method for damaged tubes, according to company documents filed with the NRC.