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Nuclear Regulators Determine Water Leak at TXU Plant Should Have Been Noticed
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Nuclear Regulators Determine Water Leak at TXU Plant Should Have Been Noticed

Dec. 11--GLEN ROSE, Texas--Corrosion that caused a small radioactive-water leak at the Comanche Peak nuclear power plant in late September should have been noticed and repaired as early as April 2001, federal regulators and TXU executives said Tuesday.

The leak, which was stopped within a few days, did not release radiation into the environment or pose a risk to the public, government officials said at a meeting at the plant, about 75 miles southwest of Dallas.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials said the failure to note a "clearly identifiable" flaw in a steam-generator tube could result in a violation notice for the Dallas-based utility, though no decision has been made. Officials said two other errors made when the leak was found were minor and would not result in violation notices.

"We feel like Comanche Peak took appropriate and conservative action in response to the tube leak," said Dwight Chamberlain, reactor safety director for the NRC's Arlington regional office.

James Kelley, a TXU vice president, said the company agrees with an NRC finding that tests during a routine shutdown in April 2001 showed problems with the tube that later leaked.

"That crack that we missed ... caused this small, minor leak," he said.

Plant officials were not required to shut down the two-reactor plant's Unit 1 after finding the leak Sept. 26 but chose to do so Sept. 28. The reactor was scheduled for a refueling shutdown and equipment inspection starting the next week.

That work and the leak repair are done, but the reactor was still shut down Tuesday because of separate equipment problems.

The leak was the first since Comanche Peak's Unit 1 reactor started full-power operations in 1990. However, the utility has plugged hundreds of steam-generator tubes to take them out of service after signs of corrosion were found.

In each of the two units, more than 18,000 tubes carry radioactive, reactor-heated water through steam generators that make steam to turn power plant turbines. If too many tubes are taken out of service, the plant's productivity drops.

Mr. Kelley said an economic analysis would show whether TXU should keep repairing damaged tubes or replace all four of Unit 1's steam generators. Replacements would cost a total of \$150 million, he said.

The Unit 2 equipment, which is several years younger and has improved corrosion resistance, is not being considered for replacement, he said.

Corrosion of steam generator tubes at plants with Westinghouse-built reactors has been a nuclear industry concern for years. Mr. Kelley said the analysts who made the errors worked for a Westinghouse contractor.

The analysts, who run tests on equipment and then examine the results looking for problems, have been retrained, Mr. Kelley said.

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