



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC ESTABLISHES SPECIAL INSPECTION TEAM FOLLOWING EVENT AT GLOBAL NUCLEAR FUEL – AMERICAS PLANT NEAR WILMINGTON, N.C.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has established a Special Inspection Team at the Global Nuclear Fuel – Americas commercial nuclear fuel plant near Wilmington, N.C., to inspect and assess facts and circumstances associated with an event in which moisture was detected in a process vessel which should not have contained moisture so as to prevent a nuclear criticality.

A criticality occurs when un-irradiated material fissions, creating either a “burst” or a sustained release of radioactivity. During the event, there was not enough uranium or moisture in the vessel to cause a criticality.

Plant officials declared an Alert – the lowest emergency classification- at 6:40 p.m. (EST) on January 30 after instruments alarmed, indicating the presence of moisture in the vessel. The vessel was estimated to contain 36 kilograms of low-enriched uranium dioxide. The uranium material was removed from the process line and put into a safe container. The Alert was terminated at 9:07 p.m.

The NRC said agency inspectors conducting a routine inspection at the plant returned to the site’s Emergency Operations Center to monitor the company’s actions associated with the event. The NRC’s Atlanta regional office entered a monitoring mode at 7:22 p.m. and staffed its Incident Response Center until ending monitoring activities at 9:25 p.m.

The licensee is investigating to determine the cause of the event.

NRC officials said the five-person Special Inspection Team would identify and evaluate the effectiveness of the immediate corrective actions taken by the licensee, the risk significance to workers, the public and environment and the overall adequacy of the company’s response.

There were no personnel injuries, no damage to the plant or the surrounding environment, and no threat to public health and safety.

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