



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. I-08-045

July 13, 2008

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NRC SENDS SPECIALISTS TO VERMONT YANKEE TO REVIEW COOLING TOWER LEAK

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission launched a special inspection Sunday into the circumstances surrounding Friday's leak in one of the cooling towers at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant in Vernon, Vt., sending structural specialists to the plant. The inspectors will begin work at the site Monday.

In addition, NRC Chairman Dale Klein dispatched the agency's senior career executive, Executive Director for Operations Bill Borchardt, to the plant to consult with the inspectors and plant officials Monday afternoon and report back to the Chairman and Commissioners.

"While Friday's leak was not in the one cooling cell considered safety-related, we know there is significant public interest in this event. We need to independently verify that the safety-related cell is structurally sound. Even though the remaining cells in the cooling towers do not perform a safety function, we need to understand that Entergy is getting to the bottom of the problems so that the safety-related cell is not impacted," said NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins.

Vermont Yankee has two cooling towers, each consisting of eleven cells. Only one cell in the west unit is considered to be safety-related.

On Friday, July 11, plant operator Entergy informed the NRC that plant personnel discovered a pipe joint leaking an estimated 60 gallons per minute in a non-safety-related cooling cell in the east cooling tower. The leak occurred when the supply header, which carries 90,000 gallons per minute of water, sagged after the underlying horizontal support beam broke away from the vertical column to which it was bolted.

Minor cracks were also found to supporting members on two of the west cooling tower cells, including one that sustained a pipe break and partial collapse last August. The company reduced power to ensure the plant met Vermont cooling water discharge

temperature limits for water being returned to the Connecticut River. The safety-related cell was not affected.

Entergy's initial review indicates Friday's leak does not share the same cause as the August 2007 cooling tower collapse, which was attributed to degradation of the wood in the cooling tower. The plant owner is conducting a root cause analysis of the problem.

NRC's resident inspector staff at Vermont Yankee have been working through the weekend ensuring that Entergy's evaluation of the condition of the towers and analysis of the cause of the leak and sagging have been thorough and comprehensive. The NRC also will evaluate Entergy's planned actions to repair the cooling towers and return them to service.

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