



NRC NEWS

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NRC CONDUCTS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT FERMI PLANT DUE TO PIPE DAMAGE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is conducting a special inspection at the Fermi Nuclear Power Station to further review recently identified damage on steamline pipes. The Fermi Plant, located in Newport, Mich., is owned and operated by the Detroit Edison Company.

On October 11, 2007, during a refueling outage, plant personnel discovered a small unexpected hole and several indentations on steamline pipes. Under certain circumstances, these pipes would relieve reactor pressure. Even if the pipes had to be used for this purpose, there would have been no radiation released to the environment.

The plant remains shutdown in a stable condition. Appropriate safety systems have been and continue to be available.

The utility has been conducting a review of what caused damage to the pipes. Tampering was initially considered as one of the potential causes. This led the utility to declare an Unusual Event, the lowest level of emergency in the NRC four-level emergency classification system.

On October 12, the utility concluded that there was no evidence of tampering and exited from the Unusual Event.

Based on interviews and reviews of maintenance activities, the utility's preliminary conclusion is that the damage occurred during the removal of pipe insulation.

The NRC began monitoring the utility's activities as soon as the agency was informed of the situation. The NRC reviewed activities at the plant around-the-clock from the Region III Incident Response Center, in Lisle, Ill., by resident inspectors and other regional inspectors at the plant while the plant was in an Unusual Event. The NRC continued close monitoring at the plant after the Unusual Event was exited.

On October 15, the NRC dispatched a 4-person Special Inspection team to continue this review.

The goal of the Special Inspection is to review the facts and circumstances of the incident. The inspection will focus on the events that led to the pipes being damaged; the review of the utility's Emergency Plan in the context of security-related events; an assessment of the plant's response to a potential security issue; the plant's immediate and long-term corrective actions; and a review of the utility's evaluation of the issue.

James Caldwell, regional administrator for Region III said, "The plant remains safe and there is no threat to public health. However, the NRC needs to understand how and why there was damage to the piping and evaluate the plant's response to the event to gain confidence that such situations will not occur in the future."

The duration of the special inspection cannot be determined in advance, but is expected to last approximately one week. The Inspection Report will be issued 4 to 6 weeks after the inspection is completed. The report will be available from the Region III Office and in the NRC's online document library at:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>

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