

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC 20555  
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234  
Internet: opa@nrc.gov

No. 96-78

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
(Tuesday, June 4, 1996)

NRC SENDS LETTERS TO THREE UTILITIES  
ON SPENT FUEL STORAGE CASKS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued Confirmatory Action Letters to utilities operating nuclear power plants in Wisconsin, Michigan and Arkansas that use or plan to use spent nuclear fuel storage casks similar to one that experienced a problem last week.

Hydrogen gas unexpectedly ignited during the welding of a lid on a spent fuel storage cask on May 28 at the Point Beach plant, located near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, and operated by Wisconsin Electric Power Company. The storage cask had been loaded with 24 spent fuel assemblies and moved from the spent fuel storage pool at the plant to an adjacent work area--preparatory to placing it on an outdoor concrete pad at the plant. The gas ignition displaced the lid, leaving it in place but tipped at a slight angle. The event caused no injuries nor releases of radioactive material and no apparent damage to the spent fuel or the storage cask.

The cask in use was the VSC-24, designed by Sierra Nuclear Corporation, Scotts Valley, California.

The NRC's letters are directed to Wisconsin Electric and to Consumers Power Co., operator of the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant near South Haven, Michigan, which has loaded 13 casks of the same type and plans to load others, and Entergy Operations, Inc., operator of the Arkansas nuclear power plant near Russellville, which plans to load spent fuel into VSC-24 casks some time after June 18.

The letters confirm NRC's understanding that the utilities will take the following actions:

- Assess the potential for the generation and ignition of hydrogen or other explosive gases during all phases of operation of the VSC-24 system.

- Have compensatory actions in place to minimize the potential for the generation and ignition of such gases.
- Have in place procedures to respond in the event of a gas ignition and have appropriate personnel trained in these procedures.
- Two weeks before loading or unloading a VSC-24 cask with spent fuel, or placing a VSC-24 cask in the spent fuel pool, contact the NRC.

The letters require the utilities to notify the NRC when they have completed these actions.

#