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Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NRC SENDS AUGMENTED INSPECTION TEAM TO REVIEW GASEOUS IGNITION
INCIDENT IN SPENT FUEL CASK AT POINT BEACH NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is sending an Augmented Inspection Team to the Point Beach Nuclear Power Station to review the unexpected burning of a combustible gas during the welding of a lid on a spent fuel storage cask early Tuesday.

The Point Beach plant, located near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, is 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.

As technicians began welding a 4,400-pound lid on the container, combustible gas inside the container ignited. Pressure from the burning gas moved the lid slightly, leaving it about one-inch out of place. The cask was filled with water at the time of the incident with a small air space at the top.

The utility stopped the welding procedure and is now investigating the cause of the gaseous ignition. Air monitors showed there was no release of radioactivity from the container, and there is no evidence of damage to the spent fuel. No one was injured in the incident.

Both reactors at the Point Beach plant were operating at the time and were not affected by the incident.

Members of the NRC inspection team will join the NRC Senior Resident Inspector who went to the plant early today Tuesday to monitor the utility's activities. The team members are from the NRC's Region III office in Lisle, Illinois, and the NRC's Headquarters in Rockville, Maryland.

The team will review the incident and monitor the utility's investigation.

At the completion of its onsite review, the inspection team

will present its findings to utility representatives in a meeting which is open to public observation. The schedule and location of the meeting will be announced later.

A written report of the inspection findings will be issued several weeks after the conclusion of the inspection.

This was the third spent fuel storage cask loaded at the Point Beach facility. The other two were loaded without incident and placed on an outdoor storage pad.

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