

Union members accept VY contract

By BOB AUDETTE, Reformer Staff
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VERNON -- The mood was more resigned than jubilant as union workers streamed out of the Governor Hunt Building after voting to accept a contract not much different from the one they rejected last week.

"We have an agreement," said George Clain, business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which represents more than 150 employees at the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant.

"It passed" was all he said when asked what the vote count was.

"We are pleased that the union has ratified the three-year agreement," said Larry Smith, spokesman for Vermont Yankee. "That was our goal, to come to an agreement with the bargaining unit."

Though Clain wouldn't comment on the details of the contract, he did say minor changes had been made to retirement benefits and to wage distribution, adding that the union still had issues that needed to be resolved.

"The health package stayed just about the same," said Clain.

Vermont Yankee workers have complained that they are the lowest-paid in the nuclear industry. They also have complained about being asked to pay more for health insurance and that their retirement benefits were being reduced.

The next step for the IBEW, he said, is to get in contact with Vermont's Congressional delegation and push for health care reform on a national level.

Negotiators worked into the night Friday to reach a tentative contract and avoid a possible strike. Last week, after union employees voted down a tentative contract, the IBEW issued a 72-hour notice, warning of a possible walkout Saturday at 3:30 p.m. By reaching an agreement Friday night, the strike was averted.

The first vote came the same day as the collapse of one of 22 towers used to cool water that is circulated in the plant to convert reactor steam back into water.

"I want to thank the negotiating team and their families for their sacrifice," said Clain. "They were a great team and did a fantastic job."

"We respect the work force and we are glad to put this behind us," said Smith.

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The AP contributed to this story.

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