



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC MONITORING APPROACH OF HURRICANE GUSTAV; WATERFORD PLANT TO SHUT DOWN

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has dispatched additional personnel to nuclear power plants in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas in anticipation of the expected landfall Monday of Hurricane Gustav.

One plant – Waterford, located about 20 miles west of New Orleans – informed the NRC it intends to shut down late Sunday evening to ensure that all safety precautions are in place ahead of the storm. The NRC requires plants to shut down if winds reach hurricane strength. Forecasts Sunday afternoon indicated maximum sustained winds at Waterford of about 88 mph from Gustav, beginning about noon Monday.

The NRC requires plants to declare an "unusual event" – the first of four steps on the agency's emergency response scale – 12 hours in advance of forecast hurricane force winds, and to raise their response level to an "alert" when winds reach hurricane strength. Plants would escalate to a "site area emergency," primarily for plant personnel safety, in the event winds exceed 110 mph.

The NRC will activate its incident response center in Arlington, Texas, at 6 p.m. CDT Sunday. Agency officials at the Rockville, Md., headquarters, are also monitoring the course of Hurricane Gustav.

"We are taking this situation very seriously and closely coordinating with the nuclear power plants that are potentially in the storm's path," said Chairman Dale Klein. "We are confident in the plants' ability to withstand tremendous natural forces, but that does not diminish our responsibility to assist the licensees should that be necessary to protect public health and safety."

The NRC will have to approve the restart of Waterford and any other plant that shuts down. Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will have to determine that evacuation routes in the area are passable before restart is authorized.

NRC inspectors from the agency's regional office in Texas were sent to Waterford as well as River Bend, 25 miles north-northwest of Baton Rouge, La.; Grand Gulf, 25 miles south of Vicksburg, Miss.; and the South Texas Project, 12 miles south-southwest of Bay City, Texas.

Sunday afternoon the River Bend, Grand Gulf and South Texas Project nuclear plants did not anticipate experiencing hurricane-force winds or making emergency declarations as a result of Hurricane Gustav.

Nuclear plants are very robust structures designed to withstand hurricane-force winds and associated storm surges. Waterford and the other plants have watertight doors at key safety systems.

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Editors note: To reach an NRC public affairs officer during the holiday weekend please call 301-816-5100.

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