

Nuclear Regulatory Commission News Summary

Monday, November 23, 2009

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NRC NEWS

NRC Says Weekend Radiation Release At TMI Was Not A Threat To Health. News of the radiation release at TMI received significant media attention over the weekend, mostly from wire and local outlets. The major dailies left it to the wires to do the reporting. Even as they noted that NRC regulators and Exelon had both said there was no danger from the releases, many reports recalled the history of the plant and the circumstances of the 1979 incident.

In a story appearing on not fewer than 250 US and international news websites, the AP (11/23) reports that the "US Nuclear Regulatory Commission says the small amount of radiation detected at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant is not significant. Specialist John White has told ABC News that there is no indication that radiation at the plant exceeded or even approached regulatory limits." The NRC sent investigators to TMI "after a small amount of radiation was detected. About 150 employees were sent home Saturday afternoon, but officials say there is no public health risk.

CNN (11/23) notes, "Two radiation specialists from the NRC were scheduled to investigate Sunday. 'Numerous work activities were going on in the building at the time the alarm sounded, and Exelon engineers are working to determine the cause of the incident,'" said an Exelon statement.

The York Daily Record (11/23, Horan) adds "Twenty workers received exposure to contaminants, but the exposure did not exceed US Nuclear Regulatory Commission limits, said John White, a branch chief at the commission's Region 1 office, who visited the Londonderry Township, Dauphin County site Sunday to follow-up on the incident. One worker received 16 millirem of exposure, according to Exelon, and other workers received lower levels of contamination.

Fox News (11/22, 4:13pm) reported, "They are looking for a caution of a small radiation leak at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania. It sounded at a reactor building triggering the evacuation of about 150 workers. A spokeswoman says the radiation was quickly contained and they are testing workers for possible unusual radiation exposure. They do say this -- there is no public health risk. The plant has been shut down for maintenance since October 26."

CNN's "Live Sunday" (11/22) reported on the release and interviewed NRC PAO Diane Screnci via telephone for details about the release. CNN reported, "Diane is also with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. She's been on the site since the leak came to light yesterday afternoon. In 1979 incident at three-mile island ended America's nuclear energy program so all eyes are on this area when something like this happens. You can understand why people May be concerned about this." NRC PAO Diane Screnci said: "I can understand the concern. We determined that we needed to send a couple technical experts to independently review and confirm that the company's assessment. This is an unplanned exposure though it is well below regulatory limits and no impact from public health and safety but we felt we needed a better understanding of what happened and why it happened and also the actions that the company is taking to prevent recurrence."

On its website, WHTM-TV Harrisburg, PA (11/22, 8:03pm, Nichols) reported, "As workers cleaned the site on Sunday morning, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, or NRC, was reviewing how TMI handled the incident. According to John White, NRC Region 1, 'There's been nothing that we found that indicates that public health and safety was ever in jeopardy.' ... White said, 'Based in the information we've seen today, while there were some exposures there, none

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of those exposures approached the NRC regulatory limit."

KEYC-TV Mankato, MN (11/23) reported that Exelon, "Spokesman Ralph DeSantis says the Unit 1 reactor had just been turned back on after being shut down for weeks for an equipment overhaul. That, he says, helped avoid a crisis...The plant will remain closed while Exelon and Nuclear Regulatory officials try to figure out what happened."

NECN/ABC Middletown, PA (11/22) reported on its website that the "radiation leak lacked the magnitude of 1979's partial meltdown, but it was enough to warrant the nuclear regulatory commission to send out investigators. 'They have stopped all work in the containment,' said John White, regional manager of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. 'They are still trying to determine what the cause was.'"

In addition to Reuters (11/23, Joanne Allen, Chiacu), several other foreign media outlets reported on the release, including: Deutsche Presse-Agentur (11/22), GEO.TV (11/22), AFP (11/22), and Australia's AAP (11/22, Clausen), among other sources.

Gov. Rendell, Some Local Officials Upset At Timeliness Of Notifications. The Philadelphia Inquirer (11/23, Hefler, 326K) reports that the NRC "yesterday found that a minimal amount of radiation had leaked inside a reactor at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant Saturday afternoon but did not pose any health threats to the public. However, some state and local officials, including Gov. Rendell, said they were upset that notifications were not made in a timely way to authorities. Diane Screnci, NRC spokesperson, said that the leak had 'no effect on public health or safety' because it was confined to a reactor building" at TMI and she "also said about 20 of the 151 workers inside the building either inhaled radiation or touched contaminated surfaces, but said the amount was not harmful." The Inquirer adds, Gov. Rendell feels the notification could have been more timely but at this point is not calling for a formal investigation, said his spokesman Gary Tuma."

Exelon Wants To Resume Work Soon. According to Bloomberg News (11/23, Clark, Wittenstein), Exelon "plans to resume work 'early' this week, a company spokeswoman said. 'We have stopped work inside the reactor building while we investigate the cause of the contamination,' Exelon spokeswoman Beth Archer said in a telephone interview. 'There was no contamination outside the reactor building and there was no threat to public health and safety.' ... 'The concern right now is making sure Exelon is checking the workers for contamination, making sure the source of the contamination is identified and addressed and to come up with a plan to deal with these issues if they want to resume work,' NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said in a telephone interview today."

WPMT-TV York, PA (11/22, 7:01pm, Layne) reported on its website NRC's John White "said Exelon followed procedure properly and will conduct its own investigation to find out where the leak came from. 'They need to understand what the cause was before they can resume work in order to prevent recurrence,' White said."

Local TV News Coverage. While many stations across the country carried the story, their coverage was remarkably similar. WTTG-TV Washington, DC (11/22, 6:08 p.m. EST) reported, "We are learning more about the radiation leak at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission says a small amount of radiation detected at the plant's Unit 1 reactor over the weekend did not exceed safety limits. The unit has been shut down all month for maintenance."

WRBL-TV Columbus, GA (11/22, 6:05 a.m. EST) reported, "a radiation specialist with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will be on hand today at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant. The inspection comes after a small amount of radiation was detected inside the plant's reactor building over the weekend. About 150 employees were sent home, but officials say there is no public health risk."

KHBS-TV Fort Smith, AR (11/22, 6:08 p.m. EST) reported that "this morning officials say the small amount of radiation detected at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant is not significant. A

small radiation leak triggered an investigation at the nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania Saturday. Officials say the leak was quickly contained. Three Mile Island was the scene of the nation's worst nuclear accident in 1979."

WLUK-TV 📺 Green Bay, WI (11/22, 6:08 a.m. EST) reports, "An investigation has been launched at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, after a radiation leak. Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials say a small amount of radiation leaked out, but there's no sign the radiation exceed or even approached regulatory limits. About 150 workers were sent home from the plant yesterday, but officials say there is no public health risk."