

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT

REGION IV

Report No. 50-445/80-02; 50-446/80-02

Docket No. 50-445; 50-446

Category A2

Licensee: Texas Utilities Generating Company
2001 Bryan Tower
Dallas, Texas 75201

Facility Name: Comanche Peak, Units 1 & 2

Investigation at: Comanche Peak Steam Electric Station, Glen Rose, Texas

Investigation conducted: January 21 - February 5, 1980

Investigator:

E. L. Williamson
for E. L. Williamson, Investigator
Executive Office for Operation Support

3/18/80
Date

Inspector:

L. D. Gilbert
L. D. Gilbert, Reactor Inspector
Engineering Support Section

3/18/80
Date

Approved:

W. A. Crossman
for W. A. Crossman, Chief, Projects Section

3/18/80
Date

R. E. Hall

R. E. Hall, Chief
Engineering Support Section

3/18/80
Date

Investigation Summary:

Investigation January 21 through February 5, 1980 (Report No. 50-445/80-02;
50-446/80-02)

Areas Investigated: Investigation of allegations in regard to lax Quality Control procedures, welding problems and weld defects contained in an article in the December 6, 1979, Dallas Times Herald and attributed to three Authorized Nuclear Inspectors (ANI).

Results: The allegations were determined to have no merit. No items of noncompliance or deviations were identified.

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INTRODUCTION

Comanche Peak Steam Electric Station (CPSES), Units 1 and 2, are under construction in Somervell County, Texas, near the town of Glen Rose, Texas. Texas Utilities Generating Company is the Construction Permit holder with Brown and Root, Inc., as the constructor and Gibbs & Hill, Inc., as the Architect/Engineer.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The purpose of this investigation is to ascertain the veracity of allegations made by three former Comanche Peak Authorized Nuclear Inspectors (ANI) as reported by a local Dallas newspaper, and the impact of these allegations in regard to the nuclear safety of the plant.

SUMMARY OF FACTS

On December 6, 1979, an article (copy attached) captioned "Three Comanche Peak Inspectors Quit in Protest" appeared in the Dallas Times Herald in two separate places. The article was written by a Dallas Times Herald staff writer, and indicated that three ANIs had left their jobs at the Comanche Peak nuclear plant in the last fifteen months after complaining about "lax Quality Control procedures." In addition to complaints about existing QC procedures, the article inferred that welding problems existed in the main cooling water loop pipes as well as other welding defects in other areas of the plant and indicated that inspectors took records and photographs with them that would verify these alleged claims.

The investigation was initiated at the NRC Region IV office in Dallas, Texas, by attempting to learn the location of the three former inspectors in question. Region IV officials were unsuccessful in obtaining names and present location of the three inspectors from the Dallas Times Herald staff writer. Additional investigative inquiries disclosed that one of the inspectors was still employed by the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company, the other two inspectors were located in Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California.

CONCLUSION

Personal and telephonic interviews with the former Comanche Peak ANIs disclosed that none of them could identify specific areas of concern to the NRC. All the interviewed inspectors complained of lax Quality Control procedures on the part of Brown and Root, the principal contractor, but none could cite areas that would be considered safety hazards or potential safety hazards. The inspectors left the Comanche Peak site over a period of a year (September 1978 to September 1979) and according to them, one was transferred, and two resigned. The allegations have been determined to have no merit.

DETAILS

1. Persons Contacted

Individuals A, B & C.

2. Investigation

a. Background

On December 6, 1979, an article captioned "Three Comanche Peak Inspectors Quit in Protest" appeared in the Dallas Times Herald newspaper. The article authored by a staff writer, stated that three former Authorized Nuclear Inspectors had quit their jobs over the last fifteen months in protest of "lax Quality Control procedures." The article inferred that welding problems existed in the main cooling water pipe as well as other welding defects in other areas of the plant. The article also mentioned that the former inspectors took records and photographs with them to document their claims; a copy of this article is attached. The investigation was initiated on January 21, 1980, at the request of the Region IV Director, with efforts to identify and locate the inspectors in question. Numerous telephonic inquiries revealed that one of the inspectors was still employed by the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company. The other two former inspectors are now working and residing in the Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California, areas.

b. Investigative Details

(1) Allegation No. 1

Three inspectors at the Comanche Peak nuclear plant have left their jobs in the last fifteen months after complaining repeatedly about lax Quality Control procedures.

Investigative Finding

The ANIs stated that it was their opinion that Brown & Root (B&R) had lax Quality Control procedures because the procedures were constantly being changed to resolve administrative problems existing in the procedures. Although the ANIs considered the

procedures to be lax, they knew of no technical requirements in the ASME B&PV Code that had been violated by the changes to the procedures. It was their opinion that once a procedure is written, that it should not be changed regardless of the administrative costs involved.

This allegation is considered to have no merit, in that procedures may be changed to resolve administrative problems that may exist in procedures, provided technical requirements are not compromised.

(2) Allegation No. 2

The ANIs took records and photographs with them to protect themselves in case problems cropped up later.

Investigative Finding

The ANIs stated that they took copies of some records and that the original documents are available at the nuclear power plant site. The records were copied for personal use to support work accomplished during employment as an ANI. The ANIs did not have any specific cases where problems had not been resolved to the satisfaction of B&R QC or the ANI's agency. The ANIs stated that the records and photographs did not contain any Code violations that were left uncorrected.

This allegation has no merit in that deficiencies of concern had been corrected.

(3) Allegation No. 3

An ANI made statements that reportedly indicated that anybody that has any confidence in the main cooling water loop pipes would be out of their mind because of the welding problems.

Investigative Findings

Individual B stated that it was his opinion, and only an opinion, that the main cooling water loop pipes had been repaired too many times when B&R first started welding the pipes using the shielded metal-arc welding process. The ANI said that the repairs were made in accordance with and met Code requirements. Changes in welding processes have apparently corrected the problems leading to the concerns expressed.

This allegation has no merit, in that the inferred damage has no technical basis.

(4) Allegation No. 4

The ANIs repeatedly found what they thought were mistakes with welds in piping and with documentation required by the Quality Assurance code, but when they tried to force compliance they met resistance.

Investigative Finding

The ANIs stated that the mistakes with welds and with documentation were resolved to the satisfaction of the ANI's agency and that they were not aware of any existing safety hazards.

This allegation has no merit, in that finding and resolving mistakes are inherent conditions of an ANI's job.

Dallas Times Herald

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1979

15 Cents

Three Comanche Peak inspectors quit in protest

By ANDREW FOLLACK
Staff Writer

Three inspectors at the Comanche Peak nuclear plant have left their jobs in the last 15 months after complaining repeatedly about lax quality control procedures.

The inspectors, who worked for an independent company hired to make sure the construction meets code standards, took records and photographs with them to protect themselves in case problems cropped up later.

Most of the complaints involved

procedures and documentation, not necessarily the quality of the final product.

One former inspector, who asked that he not be identified, said he thought the plant would be safe. But another inspector said:

"Anybody that has any confidence in the main cooling water loop pipes would be out of their mind because of the welding problems. I wouldn't sign my name to one of those loop pipe welds if a man held a gun up to my head and said, 'Sign it.'"

The new charges further cloud the

question of construction quality on the nearly \$2-billion project being built for Texas Utilities Co. near Glen Rose, 70 miles southwest of Dallas. In recent months, several former construction workers have made charges of poor quality construction.

The charges have been investigated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; some were found to be false; others inconsequential, and still others were impossible to either verify or disprove.

In the meantime, Texas Utilities of-

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Resignations at N-plant blamed on lax quality control

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Officials acknowledge that the start-up schedule for the plant has slipped to late 1981 at the earliest and costs have doubled from the original estimates. Further delays are likely if more safety modifications are ordered after various government groups finish looking into what went wrong at Three Mile Island.

The inspectors — two of whom quit and the third of whom was transferred — were among a handful of so-called authorized nuclear inspectors who worked for Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Co. of Hartford, Conn., overseeing work being done by Brown & Root, the builders.

Federal and state regulations require the builders of a nuclear power plant to hire third-party inspectors to assure that safety-related pipe systems are installed in compliance with codes written by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

According to two of the former inspectors and other sources, the inspectors repeatedly found what they thought were mistakes with welds in the piping and with documentation required by the quality assurance code, but when they tried to force compliance they met resistance.

"They (Brown & Root) insisted on some things that made quality take a back seat to cost," said one of the for-

mer inspectors. "I feel like the cost factor was the controlling factor as far as the quality assurance program was concerned."

The two inspectors said they argued with Brown & Root personnel almost daily about whether various items met the code requirements. When agreement could not be reached, the question was referred to the Houston offices of Brown & Root and Hartford. Invariably, they said, the Hartford officials in Houston or their superiors in Connecticut would overrule the on-site inspectors and side with Brown & Root.

"It got to the point where if there was a possibility of a discrepancy, it never got to us, it just went straight to Houston," said the second inspector. "They told us we were doing too much inspection."

Officials of Brown & Root and Hartford do not disagree that there were frequent disputes often decided in favor of the construction company's viewpoint. About six months to a year ago, the disagreements between construction foremen and the third party inspectors became so frequent that the companies' Houston offices set up monthly meetings in Glen Rose to resolve the disagreements, they said.

The company officials say the inspectors had been making demands that went beyond what the regulations required and were simply incor-

rect in interpreting the code, which all parties agree is somewhat ambiguous.

The Comanche Peak assignment was the first nuclear job for all three inspectors, while both companies have staff members with extensive nuclear construction experience, the officials said.

"I will say they probably left because they disagreed with somebody who was deemed to know more than they did," said Tom Gamon, Brown & Root quality assurance manager. "We can't increase costs just because someone prefers one way of doing it to another. We bring in a higher authority."

He said a handful of cases was referred to the headquarters of the mechanical engineering society, and all but one were decided in Brown & Root's favor.

"You cannot back a man up when he's wrong," said Jim Westmoreland, Hartford's assistant regional manager in Houston, who supervised the Comanche Peak inspectors and often overruled them. He said the inspector, two of whom he termed "above average," became disgruntled because they were forced to take orders.

Westmoreland praised Brown & Root's quality control program and denied telling his inspectors to quit making waves.

Feelings at the site became so bitter

last spring that the National Board of Boiler and Pressure Vessel Inspectors, which certifies authorized nuclear inspectors, received an anonymous complaint about construction at the site and investigated. The complaint apparently was initiated by some of the inspectors themselves.

The inspection found nothing wrong with the authorized inspectors, but did find some problems with their supervisor and with Brown & Root, according to S. F. Harrison, executive director of the board.

"They were a very competent group of inspectors," Harrison said in a telephone interview from Columbus, Ohio, where the board is headquartered. "They just needed a little help from their home office. Their supervisor was a little reluctant to put the pressure on."

He said the board decided more inspections were needed at the site.

The board's initial report, based on inspections made on April 4, 5 and 6, said there were numerous deficiencies in Brown & Root's welding procedures and documentation. Harrison said the construction company was "a bit reluctant" to supply the inspectors with documentations they requested.

Brown & Root disagreed with the findings, and there was a second investigation in May.

In the board's follow-up report, it retracted the most serious charges and

said Brown & Root was taking adequate steps to upgrade its welding procedures. The construction company, said the steps were already under way before the board's visit.

But the report, based on an audit in late May, still noted a few problems. It said that in an unspecified number of instances, workers had proceeded with construction without waiting for the third-party inspectors, or Brown & Root's own quality control inspectors, to examine the work.

Harrison said the problems now have been solved to the board's satisfaction and that the plant is being built in a safe manner.

A spokesman for Texas Utilities Co., for whom the nuclear power plant is being built, said the company views the final report as an exonerating of Brown & Root's programs.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has looked into a similar allegation involving the inspectors and concluded that no problem exists. In the NRC investigation, Bob Taylor, the NRC inspector assigned full time to Comanche Peak, interviewed an inspector still at the site. He did not interview any of those who have left.

According to Taylor's report, made public Wednesday by Texas Utilities Co., the inspector said there had been differences of opinion between his group and Brown & Root but that they were being resolved. He said

some of the authorized nuclear inspectors thought Brown & Root showed a lack of attention to "small but necessary details" in welding documents.

But the inspector denied an allegation, made by a worker on the site to the Fort Worth Star Telegram, that the authorized inspectors had become so upset in August that they played dominoes and watched television rather than do their jobs.

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