

From: <VMBLANCH@aol.com>
To: WND2.WNP3(jnh,jaz),TWD1.TWP4(wjs,ljn1),WND1.WNP2(d...
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Subject: MILLSTONE

By Leslie Gevirtz BOSTON, June 24 (Reuter) - Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspectors, in a violations report on Northeast Utilities' <NU.N> Millstone, Conn., power plants, found the service water and emergency service water systems in Millstone 1 "may have been inoperable since the initial plant operation."

The June 6 report, excerpts of which were obtained by Reuters, said that at the 660 megawatt Millstone 1, first commercially licensed in 1971, NRC inspectors "concluded the SW (service water) and ESW (emergency service water) systems may have been inoperable since initial plant operation."

Northeast Utilities spokesman Anthony Castagno said in a telephone interview that the problem with the water systems was that "they didn't meet the seismic qualifications and we weren't upgrading them as quickly as we should have."

He said the service water system draws water from Long Island Sound, pumps it through heat exchangers, and returns it to the sound without it ever coming in contact with radioactive materials.

About the emergency service water system, Castagno said, "The issue here is the seismic qualifications of those. And, we weren't upgrading them as quickly as we should have."

The NRC report also mentions that the concrete foundation supporting Millstone 3 is dissolving.

Studies concluded a chemical reaction between two kinds of concrete in the foundation, now 40 feet below the surface, was causing a nine-inch-thick layer of concrete to dissolve.

Northeast Utilities estimated that it removed about 100 pounds of the liquefied concrete each year from the drains.

"It's eroding at such a small rate," said Castagno. "That concrete is a huge slab that weighs 670,000 pounds. And we've gotten about 1,000 pounds out of that in 25 years."

The foundation he said later was poured in 1975.

NU said in a statement released on Friday that the utility "discovered this erosion nearly 10 years ago, and has been working with the NRC in a series of analyses and interactions...These analyses all confirmed that the containment structure meets its design requirements."

The NRC inspectors said in their report "we are concerned regarding the long-term safety implications of this concrete condition" and gave the utility 45 days to come up with an interim report.

NU said it plans to respond to the NRC request for an updated analysis in July.

The three Millstone plants are off-line and are going through intensive inspections.

"We're finding a fair number of times, first of all, we're finding documentation that wasn't properly kept up... We haven't found any that are directly significant or extremely significant to safety, but all these things, even though they are tertiary systems, are important to keep up," Castagno said.

Millstone 3 will be the first nuclear plant back on-line Castagno said, but there is no specific restart date, "although in some of our financial filings we've projected the worst-case scenario of a restart date at the end of the year."