

## **Safety Procedures At Comanche Plant Cited by NRC Panel**

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FORT WORTH, Texas -- A Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensing board issued a memorandum that raises questions on safety inspection practices at Comanche Peak nuclear power plant.

The action by the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board casts doubt on whether Texas Utilities Electric Co. will be able to begin loading fuel at the \$3.89 billion plant by mid-October.

The panel ordered the NRC staff to investigate the safety practices and said it would await the results of that investigation before granting permission to begin loading fuel. Texas Utilities had sought permission to load fuel and begin zero-power testing while the board considered other questions about the plant's quality assurance program.

The memo, released here during licensing hearings, cited breakdowns in safety inspections at the two-unit plant, about 75 miles southwest of Dallas. Based on testimony from three confidential witnesses, two of whom still work at the plant, the NRC panel questioned the methods and results of start-up test procedures by engineers and quality assurance technicians monitoring the safety of the plant.

"The quality assurance technicians merely verify that there are numbers, any numbers, on test data sheets and they do not review whether the numbers are properly calculated, are within the test criteria or are calculated pursuant to an adequately defined test procedure," the NRC board said.

The panel also cited four more concerns: the apparent failure to document deficiencies at the plant and to follow-up in an appropriate fashion; failure to document apparent design deficiencies in an alarm circuit designed to detect overloads in the plant's reactor protection system; a written memorandum that appears to attempt to alter the way start-up tests are conducted, and the failure to detect defective test procedures at the plant, calling into question the qualifications of some engineers responsible for quality control.

A spokesman for Texas Electric Service Co., a division of Texas Utilities Electric, the principal owner of Comanche Peak, said, "We have not had sufficient time to study the impact, if any, (the memorandum) will have on our schedule." Texas Utilities estimated in July that it would begin low-power testing of the plant by yesterday.

But Dick Ramsey, a spokesman for Texas Utilities, said those plans were scuttled. The utility currently plans to only load fuel at Comanche Peak, but Mr. Ramsey said the utility doesn't have a deadline.

The troubled plant has been under construction since 1974, when it was expected to cost \$780 million. Since then, Comanche Peak has been plagued by cost overruns and delays, increasing its estimated cost to \$3.89 billion this year.