

Texas Plant Comes Under Scrutiny As Cover-Up of Problems Charged

WASHINGTON, Oct. 16 (AP) — The Nuclear Regulatory Commission today opened a special inspection of the Comanche Peak nuclear power plant in Texas amid charges that some high-ranking commission officials had covered up problems at the \$9 billion plant.

A team of commission inspectors will spend 11 days at the plant, about 40 miles southwest of Fort Worth, to assess whether it is ready to begin loading uranium fuel for tests required before it starts full-scale commercial production.

The move followed allegations in an Oct. 4 letter to Kenneth Carr, the commission chairman, from an anonymous group of agency inspectors. The inspectors maintained that Comanche Peak was not ready to begin loading fuel and that senior commission officials had manipulated inspection data to make it look as though it was ready.

Plans to Begin This Month

The plant had been scheduled to start loading fuel sometime this month.

The inspectors implied that N.R.C. documents had been edited to create a false impression of the plant's readiness to operate and that negative information about the plant owner's performance was deliberately withheld from official inspection reports.

"We believe that the commission should be aware of what we view as manipulation and the exclusion of factual information," the inspectors wrote in the letter, a copy of which was made available to The Associated Press.

"If such information were properly considered and evaluated, it would indicate a less than satisfactory performance rating in some areas" by the plant owner, the Texas Utilities Electric Company, and a need for improvements before the N.R.C. approves fuel loading, the letter said.

Texas Utilities managers are scheduled to meet with the five-member commission on Thursday at the agency's headquarters in Rockville, Md., to discuss the plant's performance.

The letter itself did not spell out what flaws at Comanche Peak might have been covered up by the commission, but the authors included pages of draft inspection reports and internal N.R.C. memorandums that they said demonstrated the seriousness of problems there.

The commission declined to release the draft inspection reports and internal memorandums.

Thomas Murley, director of the agency's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, said in an Oct. 10 letter to James M. Taylor, the acting N.R.C. chief of staff, that he had referred the allegations of a coverup to the commission's inspector general.