

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

1991-03-28

Section: METRO

Edition: FINAL AM

Page: 1

Brace hit plant lines, TU says
Water leak prompts an early shutdown

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The Comanche Peak nuclear power plant, scheduled for a 42-day fuel-conserving closure next month, has shut down three weeks early because a temporary metal brace fell and punctured lines that carry water to cool steam used in electricity generation, an official said yesterday. "It was a 3-foot, temporary brace used during construction and, for whatever reason, the brace came loose from its position and struck and damaged three condenser tubes," TU Electric spokesman Jerry Lee said of the March 20 incident.

The damage allowed reservoir water to mix with purified steam, triggering an alarm indicating sodium contamination in the system, he said.

The damage prompted the plant to move up a planned April 15 closing to conserve fuel for peak summer months and to carry out routine maintenance, Lee said. Comanche Peak will go back on line May 3 and will have its first nuclear refueling Sept. 15, he said.

The spokesman said the early closure and condenser repair would have minimal economic impact on the plant, completed at a cost of \$9.1 billion, more than 10 times its originally estimated cost of \$779 million.

Meanwhile, the federal Environmental Protection Agency yesterday called off efforts to find a cluster of 20 barrels that a Grand Prairie weekend diver said he saw last October in the plant's cooling reservoir.

The only thing found was a 55-gallon trash bin that apparently rolled into the water from a nearby park area.

"We have decided we've gone far enough," said Roger Meacham, an EPA spokesman in Dallas, referring to several hours of fruitless searching by a professional diving crew Tuesday morning and afternoon. "If we didn't find them, they are not there."

Travis Reed, 19, said he telephoned the EPA after he and three friends saw the barrels, all rusting but believed to be full, during an Oct. 28 scuba dive.

However, the EPA's Dallas office said it has no record of the call.

As for the decision to end the search, Reed said: "I'm upset about it because I'm sort of being called a liar. But I'll have the last laugh when I discover them (the barrels) again.

"And I'm not going to tell EPA or the Texas Water Commission or TU Electric," he added. "I will call all the news stations and the Star-Telegram."

TU Electric spokesman Lee said that the company plans no further search but that recreational divers no doubt will be looking for the barrels because of all the news coverage.

"We are certainly interested," he said. "If there are trash drums or any other barrel, we want to know about it. Our people will be talking with them."