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Nuclear plant unit prepares to repower

Approval of repairs to a sprinkler system, designed to cool down the interior of the containment building to keep pressure from building up, is pending Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspection.

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Comanche Peak nuclear power plant's Unit 2 should be back in full operation by June 6 after a final Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspection of repaired leaks in a containment-building water sprinkler system, officials said yesterday.

The leaks were discovered when the unit was taken off-line in April for scheduled maintenance. The repairs delayed the planned repowering of the unit, according to Joe Gilliland, a spokesman for the NRC's Arlington regional office. "We, that is the plant and our inspectors, agreed informally that the problems and their repairs would extend their downtime," Gilliland said yesterday. "We did not put them under any sort of a formal hold and our inspectors at the plant have been involved in looking at the repair plan and the repairs themselves as they were made. "We'll be making a special inspection next Monday, but it looks as if they can begin powering up this week."

Dave Fiorelli, a spokesman for TU Electric, which owns and operates the plant, said the start-up is on schedule.

"We completed the repairs on May 30 and are conducting tests of the Unit 2 containment sprinkler system," he said.

"Our plan always was to have the unit at full power by the first weekend in June, since it takes us four or five days to bring it up to full power, and it looks like we'll reach that goal. We should have full power by June 6."

The leaks were blamed on vibrations from powerful pumps serving the sprinkler cooling-system pipes inside the Unit 2 containment building, plant officials said.

Plant spokesman Jerry Lee said last week that the problems occurred on three of 20 to 30 tap-in pipes coming off a larger water supply pipe in the sump area of the Unit 2 containment building. The tap-ins lead to instruments that measure the system's water pressure and rate of flow, officials said.

The sprinkler system is designed to be triggered if there is a "heat-up" caused by a release of steam from the core into the sealed containment building, Lee said. The sprinklers would come on and cool down the interior to keep pressure from building up inside the containment building. Fiorelli said yesterday that repairs included strengthening some of the pipes, rewelding others and removing some.

He said Unit 1 continues to operate at full power.