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Regulators, TXU to discuss tubing leak

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Leaking and corroded tubing at the Comanche Peak nuclear power plant has prompted federal officials to call a meeting next week with TXU Energy, the plant's operator, to talk about the results of a special inspection.

The inspection followed the shutdown of one of the two Comanche Peak reactors Sept. 28, two days after plant operators discovered a leak in a steam-generating tube carrying radioactive water, said Ken Clark, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman.

"TXU did the prudent thing," Clark said. "They shut the plant down to find the leak."

The leak did not pose a safety or public health risk, TXU and NRC officials said.

Comanche Peak's second reactor, built in 1993, was unaffected and continued to operate during the shutdown of the first unit, built in 1990.

The plant, near Glen Rose, is about 50 miles southwest of Fort Worth.

After the leak was discovered, workers found a hole in one tube and corrosion and stress cracks in more than 660 others, TXU spokesman David Beshear [TXU spokesman,] said.

"Any time we find a leak, we're concerned," Beshear said. "This was significant, and we shut the plant down because of it."

The leak was caused by a "ding" in a tube, Beshear said. The tubes carry radioactive water from the reactor's core. The radioactive water heats four pools that make steam to turn turbines that generate electricity.

There are 4,578 tubes that pass through each of the four pools in each of Comanche Peak's two reactors.

The water is contained in a closed system in a controlled area, Beshear said.

A radiation monitor detected the leak, Beshear said.

Federal rules call for shutting down a nuclear power plant if the tube leakage rate is about two cups per minute, Beshear said. The leak rate at Comanche was about a half-cup per minute, officials said.

"The radiation monitors showed a clear indication of a steam generator tube leak," said Bill Johnson, NRC branch chief responsible for reactor inspections at Comanche Peak and two other nuclear plants.

"It was unusual behavior. The higher-than-normal readings went up, drifted back down and went up again."

TXU had to plug some additional tubes and put external sleeves on others, Johnson said.

An NRC inspection team visited the plant Oct. 17. The inspection report, which is not finished, will be discussed during a public meeting at 1 p.m. Dec. 10 at the plant, Clark said.

TXU will be allowed to respond to the inspection report, Clark said. Regulators have not decided whether to fine or censure TXU, he said.

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