

# Ohio Nuclear Plant Had More Cracks

JOHN SEEWER, Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — The operator of a nuclear reactor where cracks were discovered in the plant's concrete shell told The Associated Press on Wednesday it alerted regulators last month to more cracks found near the top of the structure.

Regulators were aware of the additional cracks before they signed off on allowing the plant, which was shut down in October, to restart this week, FirstEnergy spokeswoman Jennifer Young said.

The company previously had only publicly stated that cracks at the Davis-Besse nuclear plant outside Toledo were near the bottom of a wall designed to protect the reactor from anything that might hit it from the outside, such as storm debris.

Workers first found a 30-foot hairline crack in the outer concrete wall in early October while the plant along Lake Erie was shut down for maintenance. Other cracks were found soon after, leading to closer inspections.

The utility informed the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission immediately after more cracks were found in November close to the top of the 224-foot tall shield structure.

"At no point did we attempt to hide that," Young said.

The cracks are similar in nature and have not grown since inspections began, she said.

U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, an Ohio Democrat who has been a longtime opponent of the plant and its owner, said FirstEnergy needs to release everything it knows about the cracks, including photographs and test results.

"FirstEnergy risks loss of public confidence if it continues to tell the people of Ohio one thing and the NRC another," Kucinich said in a statement.

The company has said it plans on releasing a full report during a public meeting with the NRC that is likely to take place early next year.

Kucinich's office said it learned about the additional cracks through discussions with the NRC officials.

The plant restarted its reactor on Tuesday after the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said FirstEnergy assured it that the cracks don't pose a threat. Regulators said they also completed their own checks and reviewed testing already done by the plant operator.

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The NRC has given Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp. until the end of February to find out what caused the cracks.

At full power, Davis-Besse makes enough electricity for around 750,000 customers, primarily in Ohio. The company's electric system has 4.5 million customers in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The plant was shut down this fall to replace an 82-ton reactor head, a steel lid that sits atop the reactor vessel.

FirstEnergy said the new reactor head is made of better material than the former reactor lid that had cracks in its nozzles. The plant was shut down for four months last year for repairs to those cracks, which the NRC said were discovered before they could do damage.

The plant also was shut down from 2002 to 2004 because of an acid leak in a different reactor head.

Regulators fined FirstEnergy \$5.45 million and the company agreed to \$28 million in civil penalties following what the NRC said was the most extensive corrosion found at a U.S. nuclear reactor.

The NRC said FirstEnergy misled the agency by providing incomplete and inaccurate information about the acid leak.

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