Pump Problem Shuts down Entergy Reactor

JIM FITZGERALD, Associated Press

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. (AP) — An increase in a leak of slightly radioactive water forced the shutdown Tuesday of a reactor at Entergy Corp.'s Indian Point nuclear power plant in New York City's suburbs, officials said.

Entergy said all the water was contained in the pump. It said there was no release of radioactivity from the Indian Point 2 reactor and no danger to workers or the public. Indian Point is located in Buchanan, N.Y.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission confirmed that all the water was captured and said the shutdown followed proper procedures.

The leaking pump is one of four that supply cooling water to the Indian Point 2 reactor. The water becomes slightly radioactive because it circulates through the nuclear fuel, NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said.

Entergy spokesman Jerry Nappi said the pump normally leaks about 2 gallons per minute but operators noticed an increased flow through the pump's mechanical seal over the past two weeks.

Sheehan said the leak had spiked from about 3.5 gallons per minute on Monday to 5.5 gallons early Tuesday. He said the plant's procedures require a controlled shutdown when the level hits 5 gallons per minute.

NRC inspectors were on hand to monitor the shutdown and will look into the causes of the seal's degrading, Sheehan said.

Nappi said it's not yet known how long Indian Point 2 will be offline. It had been 230 days since its last shutdown.

The other reactor at the plant, Indian Point 3, continued operating at full power.

Indian Point, 35 miles from midtown Manhattan, is fighting for new 20-year licenses for the two reactors. Current licenses expire in 2013 and 2015. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has opposed the new licenses, saying it's unsafe to have a nuclear plant in such a densely populated area.

Indian Point generates about 2,000 megawatts of electricity and is a major energy producer for New York City and Westchester County.

Licensing hearings are expected later this year.

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