NRC: NC's Harris Nuke Plant to Restart After Fix

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RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Federal inspectors have cleared the Shearon Harris nuclear plant reactor to restart after Duke Energy Corp. fixed a year-old problem with the reactor vessel's covering, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said Tuesday.

A Duke Energy spokeswoman said the date the nuclear plant about 20 miles outside Raleigh would begin generating electricity again was being withheld for competitive reasons. The plant that was shut down on May 15 is operated by the Charlotte-based company's Duke Energy Progress subsidiary.

"We have verified that the condition has been corrected and the plant can be operated safely," NRC Southeast regional manager Victor McCree said in a prepared statement.

The company and regulators said there was no evidence of radiation leakage from a quarter-inch spot of corrosion and cracking in the reactor vessel head, which contains heat and pressure produced by the nuclear core's energy. The problem was spotted as plant operators prepared for an upcoming refueling outage by reviewing results from ultrasonic testing gathered during a refueling outage last spring.

The NRC dispatched two specialized inspectors from its regional offices in Atlanta to supplement the plant's resident inspectors in assessing the events leading up to the discovery of the problem.

Duke Energy took over the Harris plant after it acquired Raleigh-based Progress Energy Inc. last year, which made it the country's largest electric company.

NRC staffers will hold a public meeting June 13 to discuss the special inspection launched to understand why the flaw wasn't discovered after last year's testing. Preliminary findings of the inspection team will be discussed at the meeting. The final inspection report will be released by mid-July, the NRC said.

"Although there was no threat to people living near the plant, we felt it was important to conduct a follow-up meeting to answer questions residents might have," McCree said.

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