



NRC NEWS

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SOUTHERN NUCLEAR NOTIFIES NRC OF COMPLETION OF ITS SPENT FUEL INVESTIGATION AT HATCH NUCLEAR PLANT

Southern Nuclear Operating Company notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission today that it had completed its efforts to determine the disposition of spent nuclear fuel which cannot be accounted for in the spent fuel storage pools at the Hatch nuclear power plant near Baxley, Ga.

The NRC staff began an inspection looking into those records two weeks ago at the company's headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., and concluded that inspection last week at the Hatch plant.

In November of last year, the Hatch plant staff reported to the NRC that it had been unable to reconcile its inventory based on an initial review of records of spent fuel storage locations and visual verifications of fuel within the plant's spent fuel pools. The spent fuel is stored as large assemblies of slender rods in a deep pool of water.

The company initially estimated that, collectively, the fuel rod pieces that were unaccounted for totaled about 68 inches. Southern Nuclear's further examinations of its records and small fuel pieces in the spent fuel pool reduced that estimate to less than 20 inches. The total length of all the spent fuel rods at the Hatch plant including those in the spent fuel pools and the two operating reactors is estimated at about 77 million inches.

Because of extensive radiological and security measures in place, the company indicated that it is highly unlikely that any of the material was removed from the plant or is at an uncontrolled location. Both the NRC and Southern Nuclear believe the fuel pieces that cannot be accounted for likely remain in the spent fuel pool.

NRC officials said agency inspectors have monitored the company's efforts as fuel pieces were found and collected from the spent fuel pools, beginning with the first indication of an accounting problem more than a year ago.

The NRC conducted an inspection in 2005 before the company had completed its own investigation, and the NRC inspection concluding last week completes the agency's examination of what may have happened to the fuel pieces and what may have caused the problem. The review of information from the inspection will take several weeks and any decisions about apparent violations or possible enforcement action will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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