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New tritium leak found at Indian Point

April 24, 2007

BUCHANAN - A new leak of the radioactive isotope tritium has been discovered at Indian Point, coming from an underground steam pipe near the Indian Point 3 turbine building, company officials and federal regulators confirmed yesterday.

"There is no threat to workers or the public's safety," said Neil Sheehan, a spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. "This doesn't even meet the threshold for a reportable event. It's a minor steam leak."

STAFF

But agency officials acknowledged that more serious leaks of tritium and strontium 90, still under investigation at the nuclear plants, might have prompted the company to notify regulators anyway.

The leak was discovered April 7, when workers noticed steam coming up through asphalt outside the northwest corner of the turbine building.

NRC, county and state officials were notified yesterday, a time lag that didn't sit well with Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano.

"This is really outrageous," Spano said in a statement. "[Entergy](#) assures us that the leak in no way is a threat to public safety, and that is reassuring. But that in no way justifies this lack of information. We need to know that problems at the plant are being reported to us promptly, so we can ensure that county residents are safe."

The pipeline, 4 or 5 feet below the ground, transports steam from Indian Point 2 to Indian Point 3, but is not directly connected to either nuclear reactor. The steam is used to keep machines and the turbine building itself warm during shutdowns.

"It's steam from the nonradioactive side of the plant," said Jim Steets, a spokesman for Entergy Nuclear Northeast, which runs the plants. "The steam would normally have trace amounts of tritium in it."

Indian Point 3 has been shut down for most of the month after it experienced low water levels in its steam generators, where steam is used to turn the massive turbine that creates 5 percent of the state's electricity.

As it went back online after that unplanned shutdown, an explosion and fire in a huge electrical transformer caused the company to shut the plant down again and led to a lowered safety rating.

There was no threat of radiation leaking during the fire, because it was quickly contained to electrical equipment.

Company officials said yesterday that the latest leak - with tritium concentrations well below federal release levels - is not connected to the previous tritium or the strontium 90 leaks.

"This is an auxiliary system. It's not a high-pressure pipeline," said Donald Mayer, who has been working on radiological leaks at Indian Point since they were first discovered nearly two years ago. "It's a small leak, and we're still diagnosing the problem. It has no effect on plant operations."

But Phillip Musegaas, a policy analyst for Riverkeeper, cited the leak as evidence that "Indian Point is a 35-year-old, badly maintained facility that should be decommissioned rather than relicensed."

"There are potentially numerous sources of long-term leakage of radioactive water that remain undiscovered at Indian Point," Musegaas said. "Why doesn't [Entergy](#) commit to inspecting all possible sources of radioactive water leakage at this plant?"

[Entergy's](#) Mayer said that with the weather clearing and warming this week, the company expected to dig down to the pipe in the area where the steam is escaping and close off the section that needs to be repaired.

Mayer said the other leaks were still being worked on, with dye testing to determine the flow and the reach of the leaks about to be completed.

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--- INDEX REFERENCES ---

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