

Revised version

Wisconsin Electric
A WISCONSIN ENERGY COMPANY

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Wisconsin Electric suspends loading of spent fuel containers after combustible gas causes brief gas burn

TWO CREEKS, Wis. -- Loading of spent nuclear fuel into dry storage containers was suspended at Point Beach Nuclear Plant after combustible gas was detected and caused a brief gas burn during a welding procedure early this morning.

Fuel assemblies had been placed into a container and removed from the spent fuel pool. While a shield lid was being mechanically welded to the top of the container, combustible gas was detected and a brief gas burn occurred. Point Beach employees discontinued the welding procedure. No one was injured and there was no risk to the general public. The occurrence did not result in any release of radiation.

"We are conducting a thorough investigation and we will not resume loading spent fuel until we have a clear understanding of the cause of the gas burn," said Bob Link, vice president of nuclear power for Wisconsin Electric. "We will thoroughly review all of the related information to determine the root cause of this morning's occurrence."

Plant employees previously loaded two containers successfully, one as recently as last week using the same loading process. These containers are now located at the dry cask storage facility on the plant site.

Spent fuel has been safely managed at Point Beach since the plant went into operation in 1970. However, the spent fuel storage pool inside the plant is becoming full, and additional storage capacity is necessary for the continued operation of the plant.

Wisconsin Electric Power Co., a subsidiary of Wisconsin Energy Corp., provides electric natural gas and/or steam service to about 2.3 million people in southeastern Wisconsin (including the Milwaukee area), the Appleton area, the Prairie du Chien area, and portions of northeastern Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

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