

Restart Of Brunswick Unit 1 Off To Slow Start Monday

BY SUSAN USHER

Workers at Carolina Power & Light Co.'s Brunswick Nuclear Plant Monday began the slow, meticulous process of restarting Unit 1 after a 21-month shutdown, only to pause again.

As of Tuesday afternoon the unit was back in the restart sequence, but had not begun generating heat, according to plant spokesman Mac Harris.

After receiving agreement for restart from the NRC late Monday afternoon, workers began pulling control rods Monday night in an effort to trigger the self-contained chain reaction needed to bring the unit to life, to begin generating heat.

The nuclear reaction within the unit is controlled by rods inserted among a grid of tubes that each hold stacks of fuel pellets. By varying the number of control rods drawn and how much they are withdrawn, the nuclear reaction can be increased or slowed down.

When the reaction didn't begin at the predicted stage Monday night, said Harris, the pull was halted and staff began recalculating the point of "criticality" less conservatively.

"Having a calculated point of criticality is not required, but that's the way we do business," said Harris. "When we got to the point where we should see this happen, it did not. We have to ask why not?"

While the unit had returned to the restart sequence

begun Monday, "exactly when we'll be pulling rods again, I don't know," Harris said Tuesday.

If the restart goes according to schedule the unit will be producing full electrical power for CP&L customers within 30 to 50 days. CP&L is following a procedure similar to that used in bringing Unit 2 on line last April and May. The "power ascension" timetable allows for testing of systems at various temperatures and pressures as power level increases, and allows for two shutdowns to fix any problems that crop up and can't be handled otherwise.

"It's a very deliberate process," said Harris. "We want to know what we're doing as we go through the process. This unit has been down since April 1992 and we're not going to rush to bring it back up."

As of Tuesday CP&L had not encountered anything other than the routine repairs that must be made during restart as the systems begin operation.

"There are some things you can't check until you put it back together and see how it works," said Harris.

According to officials with CP&L and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a successful restart will be a key factor in how soon the plant may be removed from the NRC's "watch list" of problem plants.

On April 21, 1992, CP&L shut down both Units 1 and 2 after discovering counterfeit and improperly installed bolts in the walls of the emergency diesel genera-

tor building. The NRC became concerned about the structural soundness of other critical areas of the plant and subsequently placed the plant on its watch list on June 30, 1992.

By the time Unit 2 came back in service last May, the utility had inspected more than 345,000 structural components and completed major upgrades to the masonry walls, miscellaneous structural steel, emergency diesel generators and other key systems.

Unit 2 has operated without interruption since its restart.

Still, at semiannual safety performance review meetings held last June and again Jan. 11-13, NRC senior managers chose to leave both Units 1 and 2 under increased monitoring to assure continued progress, while praising improvements that had been made over the past 18 months.

"Last June, the NRC laid out three criteria they expect us to meet before they will consider taking us off the list," said Roy Anderson, vice president of the Brunswick plant, in a prepared statement. "These are the successful restart of Unit 2, sustained trouble-free operation of Unit 2, and the restart of Unit 1."

"We have met two of these criteria in exemplary fashion, and we are in the process of meeting the third." The plant will remain on the "watch list" for at least

the next six months, until the next review.

In a letter to CP&L dated Jan. 25, James M. Taylor, NRC executive director for operations, summarized NRC discussions of the plant as follows:

"The effectiveness of organizational changes and management realignments has been clearly demonstrated during the recovery of the station and the post-recovery operation of Unit 2. Brunswick Unit 2 has operated safely and reliably with minimal problems since startup in April 1993."

He further notes that management has conveyed its higher standards to employees, that equipment is performing well, the plant condition is "substantially improved" and staff teamwork "exceptional."

Further, Taylor states that CP&L has adopted a "proactive safety attitude and conservative decision making" in resolving issues and that staff has begun moving quickly to identify and correct potential issues, and is making "good progress" in reducing work backlogs on both units.

The NRC recommended that plant management now direct its focus to a safe startup of Unit 1 and demonstration of "sustained good operational performance" of both units.

Anderson said plant employees are focusing on the restart, safe unit operation and preparing for a Unit 2 refueling outage scheduled to begin in late March.

Draft Basin Plan Offers No Solution For Mercury Taint In Waccamaw River Fishery

A draft plan for water quality management in the Lumber River Basin to be presented Monday will offer no solution or strategy for addressing mercury contamination of largemouth bass and blackfish in the basin's Waccamaw River.

However, the plan contains information its shapers expect will improve communication and cooperation among the various agencies that deal with water quality, according to Greg Thorpe, chief of the water quality planning branch in the state Division of Environmental Management.

The draft will be presented for public comment at a meeting in Whiteville on Monday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Columbus County Cooperative Extension Service office at the Courthouse Annex, 112 West Smith Street.

Staff of the N.C. Division of Environmental Management (DEM) will present a 30-minute slide show, then ask for comments and questions.

The plan will offer no new regulatory programs for protection of water quality.

"We're attempting to use data to identify where problems are so they can be better addressed by existing programs," said Thorpe. This improved data-sharing and communication is expected to "foster greater cooperation in getting best-management practices in place."

The study includes no specific strategies for dealing with the mercury contamination in Waccamaw River because DEM still doesn't know its source, said Thorpe. "There are some possible sources, but it will take a lot more study to determine that."

Asked about the possibility that drainage or discharge into the river is a contributing factor, Thorpe said it's "difficult to know" if the water quality standard of the river is being violated. In part that is because only natural-level traces of mercury have shown up in the water column, while excessive concentrations have shown up in two species of predator-type fish.

Those concentrations prompted the state to post advisories last year encouraging the public to limit intake of largemouth bass and blackfish taken from the river, with children and women of childbearing age encouraged to stop eating both types of fish.

"Certainly anytime you increase the number of canals going into a water body it may or may not be increasing the pollutant level of that water body," Thorpe said. "We don't have any idea if those canals or activities around them are contributing to that."

According to a DEM notice, basinwide management is a new approach to water quality management being implemented by the agency "to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of its Water Quality Management Program."

The Lumber Basinwide Water Quality Management Plan is the second of a series of basinwide plans that will be prepared for all 17 of the state's major river basins over the next five years.

The plan is due for completion in May and will be updated in 1999.

Legislators Set Meeting Regarding Low Water Levels In Waccamaw River

BY SUSAN USHER

Like other natives of the Ash community, Albert Hughes of Shallotte can remember when boating and fishing were always good on the Waccamaw River, and he'd like to see the river restored to its glory days.

"I'd like to see that river fixed, and fixed right, but I know it's probably not economically feasible," he said. "But it would be the best thing to do environmentally."

"I can remember when it was as good a place to go as there is. That's another one of those things that we had all our lives that has changed," he reflected Monday. "It could have the best recreational fishing anywhere around if the water could just remain up."

Hughes isn't the only area resident concerned about the loss of boating and recreational fishing in the Waccamaw River.

"A lot of people in the Waccamaw area have asked me for a long time to do something about wa-

ter flow control on the Waccamaw River," said Rep. E. David Redwine.

He and fellow legislators Rep. Dewey Hill and Sen. R.C. Soles Jr. have set a meeting Monday, Feb. 7, at 7 p.m. in the Waccamaw Community Building to give area residents like Hughes a chance to ask state and federal officials what can be done about the river.

The meeting will follow a fact-finding tour that begins at 4 p.m. for the group of state and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials.

"What local people have proposed to me is to build a dam system," said Redwine. "Whether that is the right thing to do or whether it will work needs to be determined by the experts."

If a dam system or some other option could fix the problem, Redwine anticipates the meeting Monday could be the first of many.

Over the years there has been a lot of drainage occurring at points all along the river. That, figures Hughes and others, is a key reason

why water no longer enters the river slowly and steadily year-round from the once sponge-like basin of the Green Swamp. Instead, when there is water, it rushes in torrents into the river and on to the ocean.

"It's up in the winter and in the spring when it turns dry, in two weeks the water will be gone and

the fish will be gone," said Hughes.

At Pireway landing, where the N.C. Wildlife Commission operates a public boat landing, the water level remains fairly high, Hughes said. "But leave there and go a little ways in either direction to the narrow water and you can just about walk from one hole to the next. It's that dry."

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Theron Sandy Signs New Deal

Entertainer Theron Sandy of Carthage, formerly of Supply, announced Monday that he is signing with Howard Knight Entertainment Enterprises of Nashville, Tenn.

The contract moves Sandy one step closer to his lifelong dream of breaking into the Nashville country music scene.

After one last gig this month, said Sandy, "I think I've played my last honky-tonk."

Knight will be co-managing Sandy's music career with John Davenport of Aberdeen. Sandy said the agreement includes release of a video of his tune "Poker Machine," and a showcase performance in Nashville before major production

company representatives.

In addition to "Poker Machine," Knight will be promoting at least five other songs written by Sandy. "I Just Love You Baby," "Sept. '74," "Country Boys and Old Cowboys," "Million Dollar Dream," and "Sunshine" are from his "Million Dollar Dream" audiotape produced by Galaxy Publishing Co. in Aberdeen.

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