



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC MONITORING APPROACH OF HURRICANE KATRINA; WATERFORD SHUTS DOWN

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Sunday dispatched additional personnel to three nuclear power plants in Louisiana and Mississippi in response to the expected landfall Monday of Hurricane Katrina.

One plant near New Orleans - Waterford - informed the NRC it shut down to ensure that all safety precautions are in place ahead of the storm.

The NRC is monitoring the hurricane from operations centers in Arlington, Texas, and its Rockville, Md., headquarters.

"We are staying on top of the situation because protecting public health and safety is paramount," said Nils Diaz, chairman of the independent regulatory agency

At the Waterford plant the major concern beyond winds was the storm surge, last predicted to approach the top of an 18-foot levee on the Mississippi River. Nuclear plants are very robust structures designed to withstand winds in excess of those in Katrina and associated storm surges. Both Waterford and the other plants have watertight doors at key safety systems.

All three plants the NRC was monitoring are owned by Entergy Nuclear. The Waterford plant is about 20 miles west of New Orleans. The River Bend plant is about 25 miles north-northwest of Baton Rouge, La., and Grand Gulf is located 25 miles south of Vicksburg, Miss.

Waterford initially declared an "unusual event" because of the approach of the hurricane, and will raise its level of preparedness on the NRC's four-step scale to an "alert" as winds reach hurricane strength and to a "site area emergency" should winds exceed 110 mph. The alert levels are specified in advance precautionary plans dictated by the NRC. The "site area emergency" classification is associated with plant personnel safety.

The NRC will have to approve the restart of Waterford and any other plant that shuts down. Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will have to determine that evacuation routes in the area are passable.

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