Idle reactor back up at Oconee Nuclear Station

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BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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SENECA — Idle since a transformer fire knocked it offline earlier this month, the oldest reactor at Oconee Nuclear Station was back up Tuesday cranking heat.

Duke Energy services most of the Upstate, which depends on electricity generated out of ONS. Service was never in jeopardy, because two other reactors were ably picking up the load.

The Unit 1 reactor was brought back online at 10:43 a.m. Tuesday, Duke spokesman Andrew Beckner told The Journal.

It took all of 23 days to get the idle reactor back running after it was safely shut down after a transformer fire was reported on March 6. There were no injuries, and according to Duke Energy, neighbors and employees were not impacted.

The nuclear plant is located off S.C. Highway 130, about six miles north of Seneca.

Beckner said the main transformer was replaced with a spare transformer that was on site.

"We are continuing our thorough investigation of the cause of this fire," Beckner said. "The safe, reliable operation of Oconee Nuclear Station is always our top priority. We take the reliability of all plant equipment seriously, and we're working to fully understand the events of March 6."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which oversees all commercial nuclear plants operating in the United States, has

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three on-site inspectors at ONS. The inspectors will file a report on the March 6 incident as part of their quarterly inspection report on the plant that is submitted to the NRC.

Roger Hannah, a spokesman for the NRC, told The Journal on Monday the agency did not see the March 6 event as requiring a separate report. Hannah added the NRC did not send additional inspectors to Oconee, which would have been the case if merited.

Unit 1 began commercial operation at ONS in 1973, followed by units 2 and 3 the following year. According to Duke Energy, the three reactors at ONS have a generating capacity of approximately 2.6 million kilowatts, which is enough to power 1.9 million homes.

carlos@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684
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