

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A transformer fire at the Oconee Nuclear Station caused an elevated emergency protocol on Sunday afternoon.

Nuclear unit remains shut down after fire

Duke investigating cause of blaze that triggered alert

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THE JOURNAL

SENECA — After a transformer fire at the Oconee Nuclear Station caused one unit to be shut down and an elevated emergency protocol declared, Duke Energy exited the alert classification at 8:16 p.m. Sunday.

Spokesperson Mikayla Kreuzberger told The Journal on Monday morning that Duke was in the process of conducting an investigation into the cause of the fire.

"The safe, reliable operation of Oconee Nuclear Station is always our top priority — we take the reliability of all plant equipment seriously and will work to fully understand the events of Sunday," she said.

Residents in the area reported hearing a loud explosion from the nuclear station on Sunday afternoon, and at 3:20 p.m., Duke declared an "unusual event," the lowest level of classification in its emergency notification protocol.

Unit 1 at ONS was shut down, and firefighters needed more than 30 minutes to bring the transformer fire under control.

Oconee County Fire Chief Charlie King said there was no damage to the building or containment area, and the unit — one of

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FIRE: Residents reportedly heard loud explosion from plant

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three at the nuclear site — was shut down only as a precaution.

Scott Batson, site vice president at Oconee Nuclear Station, told media at a news conference on Monday the fire was caused by an equipment issue, but the actual cause had not yet been identified.

In dealing with the fire, Batson said it was also discovered that there was a downed power line running from the plant into Duke's switchyard.

"Because of the impact to that equipment that goes beyond the transformer, we also declared an alert, which is the second level of notification," he said.

Batson said Unit 1 "is stable," and Duke would begin moving into its recovery efforts and working to determine what caused the fire, then begin restoring service to equipment that will allow the plant to exit those notification levels.

The other two units at ONS were not impacted and continued to operate.

ONS personnel reported the fire to Oconee County fire officials at 3:19 p.m., and the Keowee Fire Department arrived on scene within 10 minutes to find a large transformer outside the building engulfed in flames.

King said approximately 40 firefighters from the onsite fire brigade and Oconee and Pickens counties brought the fire under control.

The original unit at ONS, Unit 1 began commercial operation in 1973, followed by units 2 and 3 in 1974.

Unit 1 remained safely shut down Monday, Kreuzberger said, while units 2 and 3 continue to operate safely.

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