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Oconee Nuclear Station Makes Safety Upgrades

By Emily Pace



Public confidence in the safety of nuclear power was shaken, after Japan's Fukushima Dai-ichi plant was damaged by an earthquake and tsunami.

"The upgrades that are being made now would help guard against some of the events that we witnessed in Japan," said Site VP Preston Gillespie of Oconee Nuclear Station.

The facility has been under construction for 10 years, and work to enhance safety to the three reactors isn't done, according to Gillespie.

"We are really improving the redundancy and diversity of existing safety systems," Gillespie adds.

On Wednesday, Gillespie and others met with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to give an update on various improvement projects, which include plans to better protect the site against floods, tornadoes and fire.

The meeting was open to the public.

"They are inherently dangerous, which is one of the reasons why these meetings are so important because we depend on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to represent us and our interests," said Lake Keowee resident John Hester.

Hester lives within a mile of the facility and decided to attend, hoping to find out what operators are doing to ensure his safety.

Officials say they've replaced several pieces of older equipment and reinforced structures to protect against severe weather.

A system was also installed that would provide necessary cooling for safety systems in the event of an accident.

“The Oconee Nuclear Station was safe before these enhancements, but this provides an additional level of safety at the plant,” said U.S. NRC spokesman Roger Hannah.

The improvement projects are not related to the events in Japan; however, regulators are pleased with the progress.

The upgrades are estimated to cost around \$2 billion and construction will not be completed until 2016.

In addition to enhancements, Duke Energy wants to build a new plant in Gaffney.

A public meeting is scheduled for January 19 from 1-4 p.m. and 7-10 p.m. at the Restoration Church International located at 1905 Limestone Street in Gaffney.