Oconee officials investigating tritium in water

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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SENECA — Officials at the Oconee Nuclear Station were investigating the cause of a water leak Tuesday, which recorded small amounts of the radioactive isotope tritium.

Oconee spokeswoman B.J. Gatten said Thursday the incident revealed the water had 3,150 picocuries per liter in it, well below the standard for drinking water of less than 20,000 picocuries. She said officials do not know how much of the water leaked but "assumed it was more than 100 gallons."

"Late Tuesday afternoon while the plant was conducting a planned transfer from one chemical treatment pond to another, we observed some water seeping up from the ground near the transfer piping between the ponds," Gatten said. "The transfer of water was stopped within an hour of our discovery."

She said the incident did not cause safety problems for the community or plant employees, and officials "voluntarily notified some state agencies, but there was no requirement to do so."

"It's very, very low concentration of tritium," Gatten added. "The water never left the site. It was contained on site and was not in close proximity to any drinking water. Tritium is found naturally in air and water. It is a byproduct of nuclear reactor operations, but you've got to ingest tritium in very large quantities to ingest any significant health risk."

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>
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> Oconee Nuclear Center spokeswoman

Gatten called the transfer of water "a normal operation" and said inspections were being done this week "to determine the source of the seepage and to make the necessary repairs."

Joey Ledford, a spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), said officials with the commission are monitoring the situation. He said similar issues have happened at other nuclear plants.

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