Oconee siren alert system repaired

NRC: 'Backup' plan was in place in case of an emergency

By Eric Connor
Staff Writer
econnor@greenvilleonline.com

The siren alert system that would warn residents of an emergency at the Oconee Nuclear Station was inoperable for 24 hours before being fixed on Wednesday, nuclear regulators said.

The malfunction of sirens within a 10-mile radius of the three-reactor nuclear plant was the result of problems with the station's computer system, Duke Energy spokeswoman Sandra Magee said.

"We began troubleshooting immediately and discovered an issue with the computer system that has been corrected," Magee said.

All 65 sirens were inoperable following a test late Tuesday morning, a test that is performed weekly, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said Wednesday in a report.

The lack of an operable siren system meant that the station would have had to rely on its backup "route alerting" plan — which calls for Oconee and Pickens counties emergency personnel to drive through affected areas and warn residents via loudspeaker, NRC spokesman Roger Hannah said.

The NRC notification document classified the "initial safety significance" as "none."

The backup plan, approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, would have sufficed in the eyes of nuclear regulators, Hannah said.

"That's why there would not be more significance," he said. "It has happened from time to time at other plants throughout the country."

The nuclear station must investigate and report the cause of the siren failure to the NRC, Hannah said.

The sirens were tested silently on Wednesday to ensure they work.