



NPPD: Nuke Plant Could Be Shut Down "In Three Seconds", Critics Still Worry

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Despite ongoing and growing flood worries don't tell the folks who run a Nebraska nuclear power plant, which is designed similar to the wrecked reactor in Japan, that the facility 70 miles from Lincoln and Omaha is an accident waiting to happen.

Even in the face of key safety questions over the years, some as recently as two months ago, the **Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD)**

insists the 37-year-old **Cooper Nuclear Station in Brownville, Missouri River**, is as secure as they come.

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the safest, **Alan Dostal** who is NPPD's nuclear expert says, "We are an absolutely safe plant, that's a 10."

Dostal's comments came during an interview with **Nebraska Watchdog** on March 29, five days before three workers at Cooper were exposed to radiation. According to the **Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)** a **fuel rod accident triggered alarms**



that are worn by the workers. NPPD says the incident which is still under investigation did not cause any apparent injuries but was "unacceptable." The NRC wants "to understand why normal work practices were not followed."



In the meantime **Beyond Nuclear**, an anti-nuclear power group, is petitioning the NRC to suspend Cooper's license along with the licenses of 20 other U.S. reactors that in many respects mirror the tsunami-crippled **Fukushima Dai-ichi** plant.

In its petition, filed before the Flood of 2011, Beyond Nuclear didn't mention Nebraska's weather by name but did say "a severe flood followed by a severe thunderstorm or accompanied by a large tornado" could cause a Fukushima like

situation.

In addition the federal government's own **Sandia National Laboratories** has concluded that similarities between the Dai-Ichi plant and reactors like Cooper pose a significant problem: specifically that a lengthy loss of electrical power could cause a nuclear meltdown.



But when it comes to Cooper, NPPD's Dostal finds the Sandia study a case of apples and oranges. Dostal says, "We don't believe that the Sandia analysis lines up very well with our configuration." Asked by **Nebraska Watchdog** if he out rightly dismisses the Sandia research Dostal replied, "Well you wouldn't dismiss it, you just have to understand that what they analyzed and what we have are not the same thing."



As for the threatening Missouri River, following Monday evening's rain storm, it was two feet from forcing NPPD to declare an "Alert" and shut the reactor down. According to NPPD spokesman **Mark Becker** if the river hits 45.5 feet (it was at 43.5 feet Tuesday morning) the shutdown would occur over a period of 4-10 hours although Becker adds they could shut it down "within three seconds" if necessary. Becker (see full

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statement below) insists that there is no fear of a meltdown because Cooper “would be operating with power from off-site sources that would run the pumps and other equipment necessary to keep the reactor and spent fuel storage facility with cooling water.”

Becker has also noted that late last year the NRC extended the plant’s license for another 20 years. According to Becker that finds Cooper “focused on the future and improved by the past.”

Cooper’s past is not without problems. According to a 1997 report from the federal **General Accounting Office** (GAO), Cooper spent 20 years operating on the edge. According to the GAO from 1974 until 1994 the NPPD plant “did not ensure that its system to prevent leaks of radioactivity was maintained” to meet NRC standards.

Asked about the plant’s history Becker downplays the past. Becker tells **Nebraska Watchdog** it doesn’t make any sense going back over reports “that may or may not pertain to today’s operations.”

But according to Beyond Nuclear the disaster in Japan clearly indicates that industry fixes over the years have not been foolproof. Beyond Nuclear says because of design flaws “experimental back fits” have not worked.

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NPPD spokesman Mark Becker’s response (as of 3 p.m. Monday) regarding issues surrounding the Cooper plant and the threatening waters of the Missouri River:

“If we would be required by our procedures to shutdown the reactor if water reached the 902 feet above sea level (45.5 on the Brownville river gauge) we would do a shutdown. More than likely we would do a shutdown over a period of 4 to 10 hours, but could shut the reactor down within three seconds. We prefer to slowly go down to avoid errors. No melt down would occur because the safety systems would be operating with power from off-site sources that would run the pumps and other equipment necessary to keep the reactor and spent fuel storage facility with cooling water. The shutdown would be similar to the same types of actions taken when we go into a refueling outage and we have gone through more than 26 refueling outages. In the event we would lose off-site power, we have three diesel generators available to operate the safety systems. There is already diesel fuel available for 20 days of continuous operation (diesel; generators are tested monthly and we added the third backup system during the last refueling outage) plus we have brought in several tankers filled with diesel fuel and have alerted our fuel supplier to need of additional fuel if needed. We also have available backup sources of power with the use of batteries that can operate 4-8 hours with a portable diesel generator available to recharge those batteries.”

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