

# The Washington Times

## Floods threaten Nebraska nuclear plants

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Two nuclear-power plants in Nebraska remain threatened by Missouri River flooding, including one plant where a fire briefly shut down a cooling system for spent fuel rods earlier this month.

Federal and state officials said there is no danger of a radiation leak and insisted the facilities would not see a repeat of [Japan\(/topics/japan/\)](#)'s Fukushima nuclear-power plant disaster.

[Jeff Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#), spokesman for the Omaha Public Power District that operates the Fort Calhoun Station, dismissed Internet reports by bloggers and anti-nuclear groups on the threat of flooding.

"This is not something out of the ordinary," [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said. "We train for this."

Concerns over the flooding of the nuclear plants heightened after a June 7 fire in a basement switch-gear room of the Fort Calhoun Station, a nuclear-power plant 19 miles north of Omaha.

The fire cut off electricity to a cooling pump used to prevent spent nuclear fuel rods in a cooling pond from overheating. The power outages lasted an hour and a half, [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said.

During that time, the temperature in the pool only rose two degrees, reaching 82 degrees Fahrenheit, [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said, noting the water has to reach 212 degrees to release radiation.

The tsunami that damaged the [Fukushima plant\(/topics/fukushima-plant/\)](#) shut down the cooling system and resulted in a meltdown of spent fuel rods.

[Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said advance preparation helped both plants avoid a Fukushima-like meltdown.

"[Fukushima\(/topics/fukushima-plant/\)](#) did not have the opportunity [to prepare] and was then hit with a wall of water," [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said. "Ours is not. We've had time to prepare."

Water levels at the Fort Calhoun Station rose 1,006 feet above sea-level Monday, [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said. The plant's nuclear reactor, which was shut down April 9 for routine refueling, is protected against floods that reach 1,014 feet, he said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controls Missouri River water levels by changing water-flow rates from six dams along the river.

In May, heavy rain in Montana and North and South Dakota fell in amounts that typically take an entire year, Army Corps spokesman [Carlos Lazo\(/topics/carlos-lazo/\)](#) said. The increase in rainfall and anticipated snowmelt led to greater water releases along the river dams, he said, including its latest water-flow raises Saturday and Sunday. [Mr. Lazo\(/topics/carlos-lazo/\)](#) said the increases will be the Corps' last upward adjustments.

“We’re maintaining the releases until mid-August because of the ongoing snowmelt,” [Mr. Lazo\(/topics/carlos-lazo/\)](#) said.

None of the spokesman would say what would happen if water levels increased and flooded the plants.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman Victor Dricks, speaking for the region that includes Nebraska, dismissed worst-case scenarios as speculation.

Flooding of the plants is “not a concern,” he said.

The second plant, the Cooper Nuclear Station, located several miles from the Nebraska-Missouri border, has not experienced any flooding, and as of Monday, continued to operate at full capacity, said Mark Becker, a spokesman for the Nebraska Public Power District, which operates the plant.

Workers at the plants continued to prepare for flooding by placing sandbags and 8-foot-tall water-filled rubber barriers to protect the reactors from the river water, officials said.

Recently, some buildings at Fort Calhoun suffered water damage, but they were described as “minor buildings,” including a warehouse, that pose no risk for the possible release of radiation, [Mr. Hanson\(/topics/jeff-hanson/\)](#) said.

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