

## Media representative tours Cooper Nuclear Power Plant

By Pool notes from Associated Press Writer Josh Funk

**AP**

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Nebraska City, Neb. — 6/26/11 tour of Nebraska Public Power District's Cooper nuclear power plant near Brownville, Neb.

Editor's Note: Following are the pool notes from Associated Press Writer Josh Funk.

Art Zaremba, director of nuclear safety at Cooper:

Zaremba said Cooper has two main sources of off-site power that come into facility as well as two diesel generators that can power the entire plant. NPPD also has a third portable generator in place that can power safety equipment.

The two main switchyards at the plant are surrounded by 8-foot-tall Hesco barriers filled with 6 feet of compacted sand.

"The plant is very safe right now, and we've taken a lot of steps to make sure it stays that way," Zaremba said.

Exterior tour with Cooper nuclear licensing manager Dave Van Der Kamp: Van Der Kamp has worked at Cooper for 29 years. He said this year's flooding reminds him of the 1993 flood except that the river is projected to remain high for months this summer.

The dry cask storage that holds used fuel is also elevated to 903.5 feet.

Van Der Kamp says the dry casks are rated to be submerged in as much as 50 feet of water.

The main protection of Cooper is the height of the plant. And inside the plant, some of the equipment is elevated too.

"We're protecting the site to go at least up to 906 feet," Van Der Kamp said.

NPPD's main concern in the flood planning is making sure electrical power is maintained to the site.

"We have so many redundant power supplies. It's hard to imagine losing all of that

Classroom looking at diagram:

The main Cooper plant is built at 903.5 feet, and the utility has put up sandbags and other barriers to protect the main building up to 906 feet.

On Sunday, the river was measured at 899.1 feet.

NPPD began flood preparations when the water reached 895 feet. The utility started putting up sandbag barriers and Hesco barriers at that point.

NPPD's Brian Hasselbring, who is a senior reactor operator, said the main control room at Cooper is at 932 feet elevation. The top of the reactor is at 1,001.

The top of the spent fuel pool is 1,001 feet and water is 38 feet deep.

The main switchyard outside is at 897 feet with six feet of sandbag protections up to 903 feet above sea level.

The worst case scenario of Gavins Point dam breaking would be expected to create flooding up to 906 feet at Cooper and the plant is designed to handle that.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory Jaczko visited Cooper Sunday to check out the measures the Nebraska Public Power District had taken to keep Missouri River floodwaters at bay. Jaczko plans to visit Nebraska's other nuclear power plant on Monday.

A second-floor break room at Cooper offers a view of the floodwaters approaching the dry cask storage area where spent fuel is kept. But the floodwater is contained by a levee that is 901 feet above sea level and has not entered into the complex. Jaczko and the tour group admired the encroaching floodwaters from that break room. The water had not reached the elevated dry cask storage area.

Jaczko spent much of the tour asking NPPD officials and the NRC's local inspectors questions about Cooper and this year's flooding as well as history of the plant near Brownville. He said his visit was designed to gather information, not highlight problems.

"I'm not here doing an inspection," Jaczko said.

"I'm just here to get a sense of what the situation is on the ground," he said.

"Right now, we think they're taking an appropriate approach," Jaczko said.

"Our job is making sure the licensee takes steps to keep the plant safe," Jaczko said. "They appear to be taking steps to do that."

Jaczko said he can't predict what the river will do this summer, but he said it looks like NPPD is taking the right steps to defend against flooding.

Jaczko said it is interesting to see the water up as high as it is, but it looks like appropriate measures are being taken to keep the plant safe.

"This plant is designed to deal with a flood much higher than we are seeing \_ 906 feet," Jaczko said.

Brian O'Grady, NPPD's chief nuclear officer, said he hoped the tour would show how safe Cooper is. The power plant sits about 4 feet above where the river's level on Sunday even though river had spilled out of its banks near the plant and filled in low-lying land near Cooper. But an earthen levee is holding back the floodwaters and keeping them from entering the complex.

"We want to show you where the water is and where it isn't," O'Grady said.

During the tour, he pointed out that regulations call for Cooper to shut down if the river rises to 902 feet above sea level. If it did hit that point, the river would have to cross a large open area more than 40 feet wide to reach the plant building. And the building itself is at 903.5 feet elevation.

"We'd shut down at 902, and there's several feet of margin," O'Grady said.

Jaczko left the media tour behind after checking out the control room, and he continued on into the heart of Cooper to see areas closer to the reactor. He spent more than an hour touring the inner workings of Cooper after leaving reporters.

After completing the tour and meeting with the local NRC inspectors, Jaczko praised NPPD's efforts to protect Cooper.

"I got to see a lot of efforts they're taking to deal with flooding and the challenges that presents," Jaczko said.

"This is a plant that is operating safely and meeting our standards," Jaczko said.

Jaczko said the loss of the berm at Fort Calhoun nuclear plant doesn't threaten the safety of the plant. He said it was his understanding that the inflatable berm that failed Sunday was an enhancement to existing flood protection plans there.

"There are other structures and systems in place that can ensure they

will continue operating safely," Jaczko said.

Jaczko said one of the things the NRC learned from the nuclear disaster in Japan was the importance of considering natural disasters and the likelihood of a power plant dealing with multiple problems at the same time.

Unlike the Japanese disaster, he said Fort Calhoun is dealing with a single problem: flooding. He said there are really a lot of good things going on at Fort Calhoun.

"I feel very comfortable that we have a good program in place, so plants can deal with issues that we think are out there," Jaczko said.

He said he's comfortable with the measures NPPD has taken to protect Cooper from floodwaters.

"They've made substantial progress in preparing for higher flood levels," Jaczko said about Cooper.

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