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Nuclear Plant Withdraws Declaration of Unusual Event

RICHLAND, Wash. – Energy Northwest today determined its declaration of an unusual event at Columbia Generating Station, submitted Thursday to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, was unnecessary. Upon further review, Columbia officials concluded that the hydrogen burn, a less than one-second “puff,” in the turbine building posed no risk to the normal level of plant safety.

Though the declaration had no association with the reactor building or radiation, the decision to declare an unusual event reflected the conservative safety culture of the U.S. nuclear industry.

On Thursday, a small amount of residual trapped gas ignited and extinguished itself in less than a second when workers cut into a pipe. No one was injured, but Energy Northwest declared an unusual event and evacuated a crew of approximately two dozen workers from the immediate area as a precautionary measure. Work resumed in the area following a safety inspection.

Columbia powered down April 2 in preparation for its biennial refueling and maintenance outage. The outage is scheduled to be completed by mid-June.

An unusual event is a classification describing a condition at a commercial nuclear power plant or its surroundings that could potentially compromise the normal level of plant safety, or that warrants increased awareness by plant staff.

About Energy Northwest

Energy Northwest develops, owns and operates a diverse mix of electricity generating resources, including hydro, solar and wind projects – and the Northwest’s only nuclear power plant. These projects provide enough reliable, affordable and environmentally responsible energy to power more than a million homes each year, and that carbon-free electricity is provided at the cost of generation. As a Washington state, not-for-profit joint operating agency, Energy Northwest comprises 28 public power member utilities from across the state serving more than 1.5 million ratepayers. The agency continually explores new generation projects to meet its members’ needs. www.energy-northwest.com.

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