Columbia Generating Station Off-line Due to Electrical Fault

RICHLAND, Wash. – An electrical fault resulted in a short duration fire causing the region’s only commercial nuclear power plant to automatically disconnect from the Northwest power grid and shut down the reactor at approximately 8 a.m. today.

Plant safety systems operated as designed and there is no threat to public health and safety. There were no injuries.

Instrumentation in the plant’s control room indicated the location of the fire, which occurred in an electrical distribution area typical of many industrial facilities.

The fire was extinguished by on-site fire crews in about 20 minutes. The nearby Hanford Fire Department also responded but the fire was already extinguished when they arrived.

An “Unusual Event” was declared at 8:12 a.m. and officially terminated two hours later. An Unusual Event is a Nuclear Regulatory 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. It is the lowest of four NRC emergency classifications.

A comprehensive investigation is under way to determine the cause of the event that plant officials believe started in an overhead cable-way or tray that holds electrical cables.

Notifications to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Bonneville Power Administration and other agencies were made shortly after the fire was discovered.

The plant will remain offline until the investigation is concluded, repairs are completed and the plant can resume safe operations.


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