

COVERT TWP.

Palisades keeping ahead of the leaks

More than 500 feet of underground piping replaced

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COVERT — Palisades nuclear plant in Covert Township is being proactive in dealing with potential underground radioactive tritium leaks, a spokesman said this week.

The plant discovered one tritium leak in late 2007 and another in 2009. But last year the plant's owner, Entergy Nuclear Operations Inc., decided to get ahead of any future problems by replacing more than 500 feet of stainless-steel underground piping, plant spokesman Mark Savage said.

The two leaks were from original plant piping dating to the early 1970s.

"We have since replaced all the underground piping," Savage said. "We were out ahead of it (future issues)."

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko suggested this week that the NRC may step up its efforts to deal with tritium leaks at nuclear plants.

He said much more can be done to manage aging pipes, which are frequently the source of tritium leaks.

Developing better ways to control corrosion or related degradation of underground piping at the plants is also part of the strategy, he said.

Jaczko made his comments about the tritium leak challenges during the 6th Annual Platts Nuclear Energy Conference held in Maryland on Wednesday, the NRC said in a news release.

He noted that tritium leaks nationally have been at the center of media coverage, congressional inquiries and even state politics in some cases.

"The headlines have not been pretty," he said. "As a scientist, I know the relative risk of tritium. In the grand scheme of radiation, it is well down the scale, but in the area of public perception, it takes on greater significance. People are asking legitimate questions."

He continued: "We always have to ask ourselves at every turn whether we can do more. That's why the agency is participating in a buried piping task force to evaluate the need for specific corrosion standards that could be implemented at nuclear power plant facilities," Jaczko said.

Regarding the possibility of new standards and requirements, Savage said Palisades is being proactive on the issue.

"We will do what the regulators request to ensure the safe, reliable operation of this over plant," Savage said.

The first Palisades tritium leak was found shortly after NRC-required monitoring wells were installed in November 2007. The NRC ordered the monitoring systems to be installed at nuclear plants across the country after a tritium leak was found at a nuclear plant in Braidwood, Ill.

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Getting it straight

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► **COVERT** — More than 500 feet of underground piping has been replaced at the Palisades nuclear plant in Covert Township as a proactive approach to preventing tritium leaks. An article in the Local section Saturday contained a quote from Palisades spokesman Mark Savage that was out of context and cut short. The quote incorrectly stated that all the underground piping at the plant has been replaced.