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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT JAMES A. FITZPATRICK NUCLEAR PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has initiated a special inspection at the James A. FitzPatrick nuclear power plant in response to the discovery of cracking in the facility's torus, or pressure suppression chamber, and a shutdown cooling line. Members of the three-person team arrived this afternoon at the Scriba, N.Y., plant, which is operated by Entergy.

Among the objectives of the special inspection in the short term will be to review the adequacy of Entergy's initial evaluations of the cause, the company's assessment of whether any additional cracking exists and its repair work prior to the plant returning to service. Subsequently, the inspectors will more closely examine Entergy's corrective actions, including its investigation into the defects, its root-cause evaluation and any potential generic safety concerns.

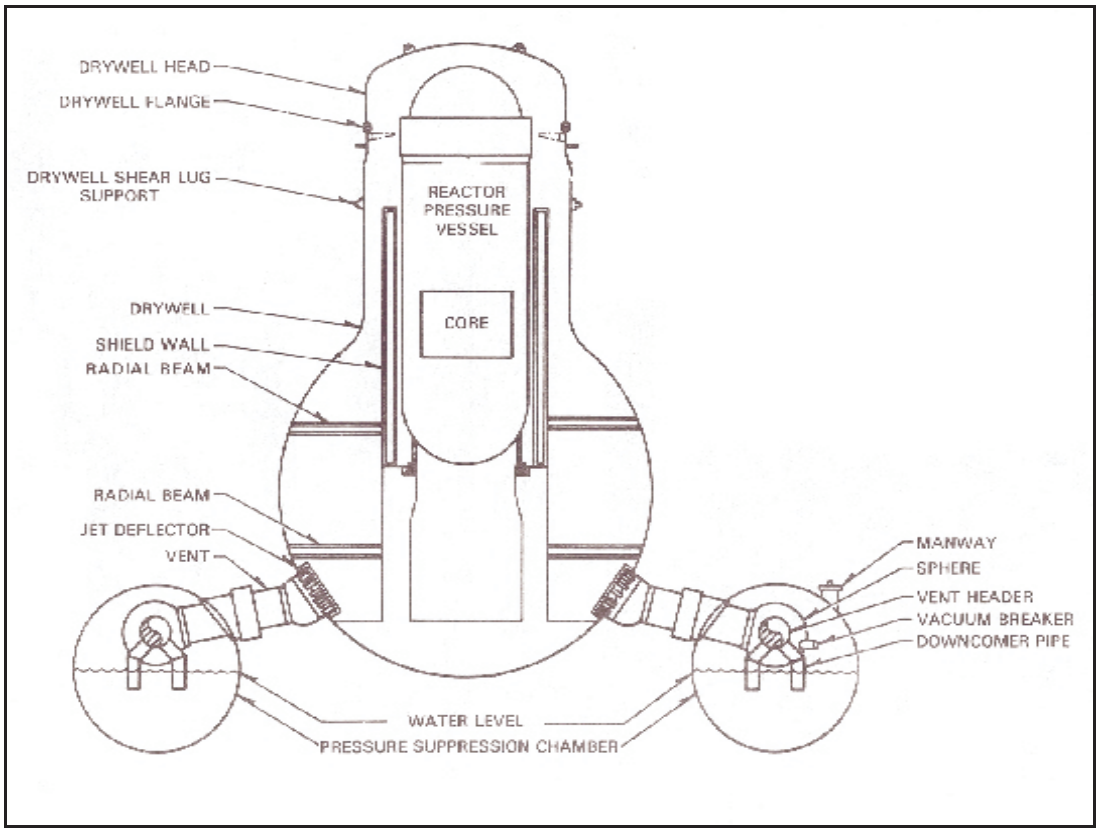
"We expect Entergy to undertake a vigorous and thorough review of these issues," NRC Region I Administrator Samuel J. Collins said. "The purpose of this special inspection is to help ensure these problems are fully understood and addressed so that the plant's safety margins are preserved."

The plant's torus is a large, doughnut-shaped structure that is partially filled with water (identified in graphic below as the pressure suppression chamber). It is located at the base of the reactor building. During a severe event at the facility, steam generated by the reactor would be deposited into the chamber to help reduce heat and pressure levels and cool down the plant.

On June 27, a crack measuring about 4.6 inches in length was found on the torus. Because it represented a potential loss of the plant's containment mechanisms during an emergency, the reactor was subsequently shut down. It remains out of service while reviews and repairs are undertaken.

Entergy also identified a crack on a shutdown cooling line on July 4. This crack, measuring about 6.5 inches in length, is of concern because a failure of the line could complicate the cooling of the plant.

Once the inspection is completed, the special inspection team will document its findings and conclusions in a report that will be issued within 45 days of an exit meeting with plant managers.



The above graphic shows a cross-section of a pressure suppression chamber, also known as a torus. The cross-section measures 29.6 feet wide. The chamber typically holds 790,000 gallons of water.

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