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NRC mulls reissue of nuclear plant status report

NEW YORK, Dec 28 (Reuters) - After withdrawing data from its Web site for security reasons after the Sept. 11 attack, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) said on Thursday it still has not decided whether to reissue its daily plant status report.

^DJI	10,136.99	+5.68
^IXIC	1,987.26	+10.84
^SPC	1,161.01	+3.88
^IIX	148.91	+2.10
^PSE	700.89	+7.82
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The NRC report listed the daily operating status of the nation's nuclear power reactors.

``We're still evaluating. It's a Catch 22. Our concern is a security issue. We're trying to balance that with the public's right to know," said Victor Dricks of the NRC Office of Public Affairs in Rockville, Maryland.

``We understand the plant status report is sorely missed ... not just by the trade press but by John Q. Citizen who likes to log onto the Web site and find out if the plant he lives near is up or down," Dricks said.

Wholesale electricity traders use the report, along with other data, to determine whether the price of spot power will rise or fall.

Nuclear power, which accounts for about 20 percent of all energy consumed in the United States, is one of the cheapest means of generating electricity.

When a nuclear power plant is shut, the regional grid operator, which dispatches the cheapest units available to meet the daily demand, has to turn on several smaller, more expensive fossil plants that burn oil or natural gas to generate electricity.

Shortly after the terror attacks in New York and Washington, the NRC and other federal agencies removed data from Web sites to evaluate whether that information could be used to harm the public.

Over the past few weeks, the NRC redesigned its Web site, <http://www.nrc.gov/>, but did not reissue the plant status report or a related document, the daily events report, which lists safety-related events at the plants.

WHY OPERATORS WON'T HELP

In the wholesale power market information is king.

Those with knowledge of what will happen tomorrow can make a lot of money buying and selling electricity. To the power trader, electricity is a commodity, similar to oil, grain or gold. It rises and falls in value based on the law of supply and demand.

An electricity trader with nuclear plants has an advantage over other traders because he or she knows when the reactors will shut for work and how long they will be off line.

With this knowledge, traders with nuclear plants can buy power supplies at lower cost before prices rise when the reactor shuts.

To maintain the competitive edge, many nuclear operators, including the federally-owned Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) which operates nuclear plants in the Southeast, refuse to discuss the operating status of their reactors.

``We can't force the utility to give you the information. We don't have that authority. We try to exercise whatever leverage we have to get (the operators) to be more forthcoming about (their plants) in the interest of building public confidence in nuclear power," the NRC's Dricks said.

``If they want to withhold the information, I'm not sure there's much we can do," Dricks explained, especially since the NRC itself has yet to decide what information the agency wants to make public on its Web site.

NEW YORK'S INDIAN POINT

But people who live near a nuclear reactor often care more about safety. They want to know whether the plant they live near is operating and when it is not operating.

Wednesday morning, unit 2 at the Indian Point nuclear station in New York tripped off line.

An official at Entergy Nuclear, a unit of energy giant Entergy Corp. (NYSE:[ETR](#) - [news](#)) of New Orleans which operates the station, would not discuss the outage for competitive reasons.

The company, however, did tell the NRC and Westchester County, where the plant is located, about the shutdown.

Despite rumors of the outage in the New York electricity market, news of the outage did not surface until Wednesday afternoon when Westchester Executive Andrew Spano issued a statement informing county residents of the shutdown.

In his statement, Spano said the plant, which is located about 35 miles north of New York City in the town of Buchanan, shut at about 0720 EST (1220 GMT) Wednesday morning.

He then told the public what they really wanted to know, that ``there were no safety issues associated with the shutdown" and ``there was no risk of radioactive release."

Some people who live near Indian Point are concerned about the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe in the heavily populated area following a string of safety-related shutdowns at the plant over the past few years, including a radioactive steam leak that shut unit 2 for most of last year.

``We're trying to resolve this the best we can," the NRC's Dricks said. ``We have to balance the public's right to know with security sensitivity."

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