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State nuclear plants get security orders

Reagan Walker - Staff
Thursday, February 28, 2002

Georgia's nuclear power plants stand ready to comply with new orders issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to upgrade security.

In the wake of Sept. 11, the NRC began sending security advisories to the nation's 104 commercial nuclear power plants. Orders issued Tuesday formalize those advisories, making them mandatory.

The orders "deal with actual security specifics, such as number of guards and number of posts," said Rick Kimble, spokesman for the Southern Nuclear Operating Co., which operates Plant Vogtle near Augusta and Plant Hatch near Baxley in Georgia. "When the NRC sends an order, we comply."

Plants have 20 days — until March 18 — to provide a schedule for reaching full compliance. The agency provided few specifics about the orders, but the new requirements include increased patrols, augmented security forces, additional security posts, more physical barriers, vehicle checks at greater distances from the plants, enhanced coordination with law enforcement and military authorities and more restrictive controls for all personnel.

Security at nuclear power plants has been at high levels since Sept. 11. In late September, a helicopter flying near two South Carolina nuclear plants triggered the dispatch of F-16 fighter jets, but the incident proved to be a false alarm. In October, a potential terrorist threat directed at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania was determined not to be credible.

Of concern has been whether nuclear power plants can withstand a direct hit from an airplane. Nuclear power plants are designed to withstand trauma, such as a hurricane or earthquake. But until Sept. 11, the possibility of a direct hit from a commercial airliner had not been considered. The NRC is studying that possibility now.


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