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Contaminated water leaks from Fermi

DTE Energy confirmed Thursday that an undetermined amount of radioactive water flooded some areas of its Fermi 2 nuclear power plant on Wednesday afternoon, contaminated some workers' clothing, and entered the plant's sewer system.

The problem occurred when a drain valve stuck open on a system that filters water condensed from radioactive steam, causing a holding tank to overflow. The overflow then filled a ventilation line and spilled into portions of the plant's turbine building and radwaste building.

Some of the water also entered the plant sewage system through a bathroom floor drain.

DTE officials and those with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission still today were not sure of the total amount of water involved in the overflow, however.

Some plant areas remained damp and were cleaned and decontaminated Thursday and the utility had sealed and pumped out the sewer pipe and series of holding tanks along the pipe where the water might have traveled. A monitoring station at the end of the sewer pipe was checked to determine if any of the contaminated water made it that far or to the Monroe wastewater collection system beyond. A small amount, they determined, did reach the wastewater plant, but the amount of radioactivity in the water was not detectable by standard instruments.

The utility said no radiation dose was received by any workers.

Viktorija Mitlyng, an NRC spokeswoman, said neither the safety of the plant, the workers nor the public was compromised.

"We don't see that as an issue," she said. "Even though you have contamination, it's far below regulatory limits."

She said for any of the workers to get a dose, they would have to drink the water, not merely get it on their clothing. The water contained "extremely low levels of radioactivity," said Guy Cerullo, a DTE spokesman at the plant.

Mr. Cerullo said a number of workers had to surrender their boots and pants, but received no measurable body dose of radiation. A source at the plant said at least six personnel were affected.

The plant had been idle for more than a month for maintenance and to load new nuclear fuel into the reactor. The reactor was restarted at 1:45 this morning.

A formal report was not made to the NRC because the reactor was not operating, the incident did not involve a high level of contamination and did not affect the plant's safety-related equipment, Ms. Mitlyng said.