



Savannah River Site Watch

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For immediate Release

May 19, 2017

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**SCE&G Replaces Cracked Nuclear Reactor Vessel Head during Current Refueling Outage;
US NRC Confirms Replacement to SRS Watch**

***South Carolina Public Service Commission Denies Request for “Emergency Hearing” on Troubled VC
Summer Nuclear Reactor Construction Project – [May 17 Order Linked Here](#)***

Columbia, SC - The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has confirmed is that the “degraded” vessel head at South Carolina Electric & Gas’s (SCE&G) V.C. Summer nuclear reactor in Jenkinsville, South Carolina has been replaced.

SCE&G had informed the NRC in that “indications” (cracks) have been found in three places in the reactor vessel head during the refueling outage in April 2014 and that other cracking had been found in the refueling outage in November 2012.

“As cracks in the reactor vessel head are a sign of aging and stress and raise safety concerns, it was essential that the cracked head was replaced,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch

The cracks, found at locations where reactor control rod mechanism penetrate the vessel head, were not unexpected. Refueling outages for this type of reactor, a Westinghouse pressurized water reactor (PWR), take place every 18 months. The current outage began on April 8, 2017, according to an SCE&G news release of April 10. In that news release, SCE&G said “The outage, which follows an 18-month operating cycle, is the 23rd for V.C. Summer since the station began commercial operation in 1984.”

SCE&G has apparently not said anything publicly about the replacement of the vessel head. It is unknown when the new vessel head arrived at the VC Summer site of how much it cost.

A website that monitors outage schedule for US reactors - <https://www.roadtechs.com/nukeout.htm> - noted that “head replacement” would take place during the current outage. Clements first learned that at an NRC meeting on VC Summer on March 28, 2017 that the vessel head would be replaced

SCE&G sent a letter to the NRC on February 24, 2014 stating that it would inspect for cracks during that outage and the company requested approval for an “alternative technique” to repair anticipated “flaws.” SCE&G sent the letter to speed up the NRC’s approval for the repair process during the last outage.

On April 28, 2014, an NRC “event report” stated that the VC Summer vessel head suffered a “DEGRADED CONDITION DUE TO REACTOR HEAD VESSEL PENETRATION INDICATIONS.”

“It appears that the cracks in the replaced vessel head did not develop to the point of causing an imminent threat but we need an assessment from the NRC about the situation,” said Clements. “A crack all the way through the wall of the reactor could result in uncontrolled leakage of radioactive water, thus making replacement of the vessel head during the current outage to be of highest importance.”

The cracks developed due to exposure to heat, pressure and radiation since the reactor started operation in 1984. The single reactor is located near Jenkinsville, SC, in Fairfield County, 25 miles north of Columbia, South Carolina.

According to the NRC’s “Current Power Reactor Status Report for May 19, 2017, (<https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/reactor-status/ps.html#r2>), VC Summer unit one remains at zero percent power and thus off line. It is not known when the reactor will be back up and producing power but the vessel head replacement likely extended the usual outage period.

Two new AP1000 reactors under construction at the VC Summer site are facing a host of technical and financial issues especially in the aftermath of Westinghouse declaring bankruptcy on March 29, 2017. In response to the crisis at the project, Tom Clements requested an emergency hearing on the issue ([Docket 2017-99-E](#)). The [SC Public Service Commission denied the request on May 17, 2017](#), claiming, in error, the thrust of request had been met.

In voting on the order, no PSC member called for an alternate hearing or review of the mismanaged nuclear project, now teetering on termination. “In no way has the need for an in-depth inquiry into the status of the troubled project lessened; with every passing day the need for an on-the-record hearing only grows,” said Clements. “It is indeed shocking and an affront to SCE&G customers that the PSC is not being pro-active in getting to the bottom of the troubling crisis facing SCE&G due to serious problems facing the nuclear project. Sooner or later the matter of the troubled nuclear project will come before the commission, where all aspects of how the financial and construction problems developed, where they stand now and alternatives to the project will be examined.”

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Notes:

South Carolina Electric & Gas news release, April 10, 2017, “V.C. Summer Nuclear Station Starts Refueling Outage”

<https://www.sceg.com/about-us/newsroom/2017/04/10/v.c.-summer-nuclear-station-starts-refueling-outage>

SRS Watch news release, April 21, 2014 – with lots of useful links in “notes”:

“More Cracks Found in VC Summer Nuclear “Reactor Vessel Head” During Current Refueling Outage; Cracks, First Found in November 2012, Pose Risks and Indicate Aging and Need to Replace Vessel Head”

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srsw_news_vc_summer_reactor_cracking_april_21_2014.pdf

Articles in The State newspaper, Columbia, South Carolina:

April 28, 2014

Cracks found at VC Summer nuclear plant; reactor head to be replaced in 2017

<http://www.thestate.com/news/business/article13851104.html>

December 13, 2012

SCE&G says nuclear plant cracks repaired

<http://www.thestate.com/latest-news/article14416889.html>