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New York nuclear plant shutdown triggered by digital camera

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BUCHANAN, N.Y. (AP) _ An emergency shutdown of a reactor at the Indian Point nuclear power plant was caused by signals from a worker's digital camera, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

Federal regulators said radio frequencies from a camera too close to a control panel interfered with a boiler pump that provides water to four steam generators, The Journal News reported on its Web site.

Water levels dropped because of the March 23 incident, and Indian Point workers had to shut down the reactor two days before a scheduled refueling shutdown. No radiation was released.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said plant owner Entergy Nuclear investigated the incident, determined it was initiated by someone taking photos and reported it to the NRC.

"The direct cause was radio frequency interference from the camera," NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said. "All that had to happen was for the camera to be on."

Entergy, which uses cameras to document its equipment and was taking photos as part of its preparation for the scheduled March 25 outage, has changed its photography procedures because of the incident, Sheehan said.

The NRC was confident the radio frequency interference close to the control panel can't be caused from far away, he said.

Entergy and the NRC said information about the camera incident would be passed to other nuclear plants, which have experienced similar woes, such as when camera flashes caused the release of Halon gas at the Haddam Neck Plant in Connecticut in 1997.

The community surrounding the Indian Point plant, in Buchanan, about 35 miles north of midtown Manhattan, should be reassured the March 23 shutdown was not caused by a plant equipment issue, Entergy spokesman Jim Steets said.

"It's a good thing to learn from," he said.

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