

## Prairie Island workers exposed to radiation

*The amount that they received was probably beneficial.*

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The containment building at the Prairie Island nuclear power plant was evacuated for 12 hours last week after about 100 workers were exposed to low levels of radiation.

No one was injured in the May 3 accident and no radioactivity was released into the outside atmosphere, according to Jan Strasma, a spokesman for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The incident occurred as maintenance employees were conducting an array of tasks associated with a scheduled refueling of the Red Wing area plant's Unit 1 reactor, which had been shut down since May 1.

A report filed with the NRC stated the plant operator, Nuclear Management Co., inadvertently released unfiltered radioactive gas into the building while getting ready to work on the Unit 1 generator. Steam generators were not properly vented, causing contaminated gas within the generators to be released, according to the report.

The building was evacuated until interior conditions could be restored to normal.

About 100 workers wearing protective gear were exposed to a small amount of radiation consisting primarily of radioiodine, an isotope of iodine that is radioactive. Exposures were very small and, in the most extreme cases, were about equal to receiving an x-ray, according to Strasma.

Pam Gorman, a spokeswoman for Nuclear Management, said most employees received considerably less exposure. All were decontaminated and allowed to go home.

"It was not significant," Gorman said. "It's not a major issue."

Strasma said the venting problem was not unusual.

"It's not unusual to have some contamination of workers during maintenance at a plant," said Strasma, adding, "The number of workers is unusual."

Nuclear Management operates the Prairie Island plant for the owner, Xcel Energy, and three other Upper Midwest nuclear plants. Prairie Island's other reactor continues to operate during the maintenance period.