

Court issues cleanup plans for Exelon after tritium leaks

Exelon should have been more proactive despite the cost.

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A Will County Circuit Court order issued Wednesday has paved the way for the cleanup of groundwater contaminated by a series of radioactive leaks at Exelon Corp.'s Braidwood Nuclear Generating Station.

The court order, along with construction permits that were also approved Wednesday, allows Exelon to start draining a nearby pond to allow for the tritium-tainted groundwater. Once the groundwater moves into the pond, it will be piped out to the Kankakee River at discharge limits lower than what is required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"We are fully committed to the groundwater clean-up effort and the other aspects of this order" Chris Crane, Exelon Nuclear president and chief nuclear officer, said in a statement. "While state and federal agencies have confirmed that the levels of tritium in the groundwater are not a health or safety hazard to our neighbors, we have pledged that we would clean up the groundwater. All unplanned releases of tritium are unacceptable to Exelon."

The remediation process is one of several requirements outlined in the court order addressing steps that Exelon must take since the energy company recently disclosed a series of tritium wastewater leaks that occurred at its Braidwood facility between 1996 and 2003. Exelon had already started implementing some of the requirements, but state officials said they were included in the court order as a matter of record.

Illinois Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan and Will County State's Attorney James Glasgow filed lawsuit in March against Exelon Corp., Commonwealth Edison Co. and Exelon Generation Co. over radioactive contamination at its Braidwood facility.

"While the lawsuit continues to move forward, this order outlines the actions that Exelon Generation must take immediately," Ms. Madigan said in a statement. "Lawsuits take time. This order is about requiring Exelon Generation to take steps to protect public and environmental health and safety now."

Tritium is a radioactive isotope of hydrogen that can replace the non-radioactive hydrogen atoms found in water. It can be found in small amounts in most surface water, but exposure to concentrated levels can increase the risk of cancer, according to a statement by the Attorney General.

Since the Braidwood disclosures, Exelon has provided bottled water to the roughly 420 Village of Godfrey residences that are likely affected by the contamination and has started testing 280 private residential wells for contamination levels. The company also installed leak-proof barriers and leak detection monitors with remote alarms at the station control center and stopped using a blowdown pipe line to discharge tritium waste water into the Kankakee River.

In addition, Exelon must complete an investigation into the contaminations by June 30 and submit prevention, correction action and threat reduction plans to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency over the next several months.