

Pilgrim nuclear plant remains offline after power cuts out

Contributed by Noah Hoffenberg
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Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station
Old Colony Memorial file photo

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Pilgrim spokeswoman Lauren Burm said the plant remains offline and in safe mode while NStar and plant employees investigate the cause of trip, called a scram in the nuclear industry.

"All of our safety systems worked as designed. There's no threat to the safety of our workers or the public," Burm said. "We're investigating with NStar to find the cause of the problem." Burm could not say if the loss of electricity to the plant was because of high-voltage wires that arced early Tuesday morning, spurring the Plymouth Fire Department to head to the plant, but ultimately return to base.

"Insulators on the high-voltage lines can become packed with snow and ice," said Burm. The arc went from the wires to the ground, she said. There were no flames, and the incident occurred in a controlled area, she said.

"There was no danger to the plant or employees," the spokeswoman said. She also said that power had not yet been restored the area.

The arcing was not addressed by an outside fire department, Burm said.

The plant will remain offline until it's reconnected to the electrical grid, per plant protocol.

Emergency diesel generators are supplying power to their safety systems. The plant has diesel fuel on site to operate the generators for up to 10 days, Burm said.

"If it looks like we're not going to make that point, we'll have new fuel delivered," she said.

Burm said plant emergency protocols account for this kind of winter weather.

"It's something that we're always prepared for," said Burm.

Neil Sheehan of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said, "During the height of the storm, we had an inspector sequestered there at the site overnight."

He said the federal inspector was there during the shutdown and observed everything that occurred and provided feedback to the NRC and plant officials.

"There will certainly be some question, as to why they lost offsite power," said Sheehan.

"We're going to want to look at some performance issues internal to the plant. Nothing significant; the plant remains safely shutdown."

Sheehan said a similar problem occurred at the plant during a winter blizzard in 2013.

According to the NRC, Pilgrim is receiving additional federal scrutiny because of the number of unplanned shutdowns at the site. The plant now receives more inspections by the NRC and greater interaction between NRC senior managers and plant management to fix the problems.

In 2013, the NRC devoted approximately 6,985 hours to inspections at Pilgrim.