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Environment & Science

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Palisades nuclear power plant shuts down to fix water leak

By [LINDSEY SMITH](#) (/PEOPLE/LINDSEY-SMITH) AND [REBECCA WILLIAMS](#) (/PEOPLE/REBECCA-WILLIAMS-0)

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The [Palisades Nuclear Power Plant](#)



<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/michigan/files/Palisades%20reactor%20outside.jpg>

The Palisades reactor

<http://www.michiganradio.org/term/palisades> near South Haven has an aluminum water tank that's used in case of emergencies or when the plant needs to be refueled.

That water tank has been leaking for several weeks. On Tuesday evening, the Palisades plant was shut down so workers can fix the leak.

The shutdown this week was a planned outage – so, in other words, the plant operators saw this coming.

Mark Savage is a spokesperson for [Entergy](http://www.entergy.com/) (<http://www.entergy.com/>), the company that owns the Palisades plant. He says this tank has been leaking for several weeks. It's an old aluminum tank that holds 300,000 gallons of water. He says the tank is the same age as the Palisades plant: 40 years old.

It's considered to be a small leak and the company has been collecting the water and monitoring it for weeks. But on Tuesday the amount reached 31 gallons per day... and that was the threshold where the company determined the leak had to be fixed. So that means taking the plant out of service.

The federal [Nuclear Regulatory Commission](http://www.nrc.gov/) (<http://www.nrc.gov/>) is in charge of oversight on the country's nuclear power plants. NRC spokesperson Viktoria Mitlyng says the water leaking out of the tank does not pose any safety hazard.

"They're collecting that water; it has no way of getting out of the plant. It cannot go outside and it does not pose a threat to plant workers and at this rate of leakage it does not compromise the plant's stability or safety."

Entergy's Mark Savage declined to say how long the outage will last. But he says the procedure is pretty straightforward:

"Shut the reactor down - which we've done, unload the water from the tank, find the leak, repair the leak, fill it up again and start the reactor back up."

This time around the shutdown was planned. But Palisades had five *unplanned* shutdowns last year – and one of those was considered to be of substantial safety significance. Because of that the power plant now has one of the worst safety ratings in the country, and that means the federal government is watching the plant more closely. NRC spokesperson Viktoria Mitlyng says they want to see how the plant operators handle this repair... and find out what caused the leak in the first place.

"You know, we are at the same time evaluating plant performance. If we find any deficiencies or any findings, that will be public information, we will document it in the inspection report."

In addition to this... the Palisades plant has to undergo a major follow-up inspection to see how they're doing after all those safety problems last year. The plant has until the end of September to get ready for that inspection. If they're not ready by then, they'll be moved into a category that's one step next to mandatory shutdown by the federal government.

Lindsey Smith recently [reported](http://michiganradio.org/post/nrc-chairman-palisades-needs-work-basics-nuclear-safety) (<http://michiganradio.org/post/nrc-chairman-palisades-needs-work-basics-nuclear-safety>) that Entergy is revamping all of its safety procedures. NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko toured the plant at the end of May, and he said that plant operators have made some improvements but they need to work on the fundamentals of nuclear safety.

Here's the list of the concerns discussed at the NRC's January 2012 hearing:

- Organizational failures
- The need for a recovery plan
- Poor quality work instructions
- Failure to follow procedures
- Poor supervision and oversight of work
- Poor maintenance
- Failure to respect the role of an operator
- Multiple events caused by personnel or equipment failures
- Questionable safety structure

Most importantly, the NRC says the Palisades plant is operating safely, and if it were not, they would shut it down.

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