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# Reactor leak found in South Texas

## Boric acid leakage not as severe as 2002 Ohio breach

By Mark Babineck  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — The unusual leak discovered beneath a reactor at the South Texas Project nuclear plant, while a cause for concern, is nothing on the scale of a similar problem being treated at an Ohio reactor, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said Monday.

"There's a huge difference in perspective here" between the South Texas leak, which caused a boric acid accumulation smaller than an aspirin tablet's worth of boric acid residue from cooling water, and an accumulation discovered last summer at the Davis-Besse nuclear plant west of Cleveland.

"The Davis-Besse problem was with boric acid leakage on top of the reactor head," said Victor Dricks, spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Arlington, Texas. "It was a massive amount of boric acid crystal."

Dricks said employees used shovels and crowbars to remove the residue.

"It was that bad, and because it sat on top of the reactor vessel it had eaten a football-sized hole in top of the reactor head," Dricks said.

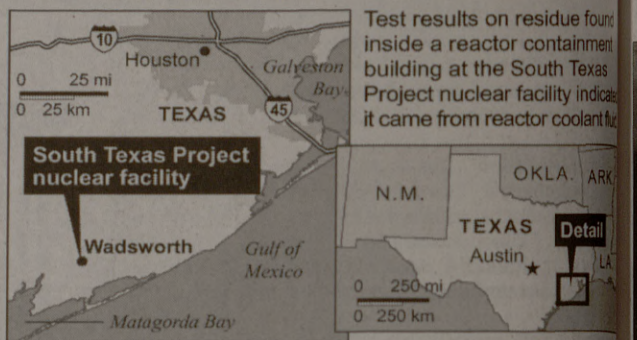
The seepage discovered April 12 at the South Texas Project near Wadsworth, about 70 miles southwest of Houston, is different because it occurred on the outside of two instrument guide tubes where they enter the bottom of one of two reactors there.

Test results indicate the residue came from reactor coolant fluid, plant officials said, which would be unique for the 69 U.S. nuclear plants like South Texas and Davis-Besse that used pressurized water reactors.

"We just haven't seen this before. Bottom temperatures are (about 40 degrees) cooler than they are at the top," Dricks said, adding that stress corrosion cracking — if that were the cause — typically occurs at higher temperatures.

Dricks added that inspectors found the problem at South Texas while following an inspection order related to the Davis-Besse problem during a routine shut-

### Coolant fluid leaked at nuclear facility



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

Test results on residue found inside a reactor containment building at the South Texas Project nuclear facility indicate it came from reactor coolant fluid.

down of the Unit 1 reactor, which went online in August 1988.

Plant manager Ed Halpin said the leak was not fast-growing and the guide tubes in question are not integral to the reactor's operation.

The facility and the agency, which has onsite inspectors at all 103 nuclear plants operating in the United States, had a telephone conference call last week in which South Texas officials laid out their analysis.

"We were impressed with the response they've taken with the problem," Dricks said.

"They committed to us closely with us."

South Texas must confer with the commission before embarking on any repair plan, and the plant has pledged not to restart until everything appears fixed.

The plant's other unit continues to operate at full power. The plant's two reactors combined produce more than 2,800 megawatts of electricity.

The plant supplies power to customers from Houston, Austin and San Antonio, Corpus Christi.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### White House cybersecurity adviser Schmidt resigns

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House cybersecurity adviser Howard Schmidt announced his resignation Monday, the second official to leave the security post in three months.

Schmidt was the former chief of security at Microsoft Corp. before taking the post in February. He succeeded Richard Clarke, who had spent 11 years in the White House across three administrations, and was the president's counterterrorism coordinator at the time of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The White House confirmed Monday

that Schmidt would leave at the end of the month to pursue other pending private sector opportunities.

When Clarke announced his resignation, he also warned of future attacks on the Internet. "As long as we have vulnerabilities in cyberspace, and as long as America has enemies, we are at risk of the two coming together to severely damage our great country," he wrote.

#### Tea may provide immune system benefits, study finds

(AP) — A new study finds that tea boosts the body's defenses against infection and contains a substance that might be turned into a drug to protect against disease,

researchers say. Coffee does not have the same effect, they say.

A component in tea was found in laboratory experiments to prime the immune system to attack invading bacteria, viruses and fungi, according to a study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences released Monday.

A second experiment, using human volunteers, showed that immune system blood cells from tea drinkers responded five times faster to germs than did the blood cells of coffee drinkers.

Dr. Jack F. Bukowski, a researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and Harvard Medical School, said the results of their tests gave clear proof that five cups of tea a day sharpened the body's disease defenses.

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