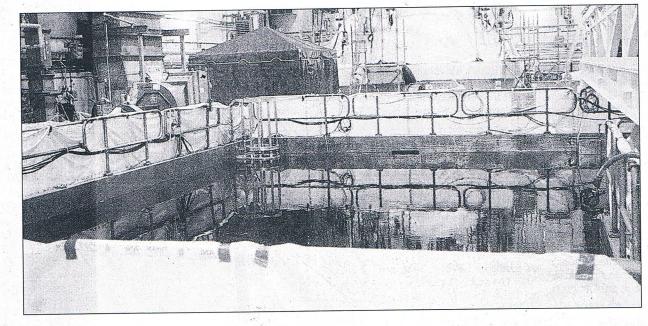


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A view inside a containment building at the Exelon Limerick Generating Station as work is performed during a planned shutdown.

John Strickler/ The Mercury

COULD IT HAPPEN HERE?

Japan nuke crisis puts spent fuel rods back in spotlight

By Evan Brandt ebrandt@pottsmerc.com

LIMERICK — In addition to undercutting national support for the construction of new nuclear power plants, the ongoing nuclear disaster in Japan has had another effect on U.S. nuclear policy. It has dragged a nagging nuclear by-product back into the spotlight: spent fuel.

Much of the escaped radiation and other concerns from the damaged Fukushima plant in

Japan has come from the deep pool in which the plant's spent fuel rods were stored, although news emerged Friday that even more radiation may be spilling from a breached reactor core there.

Spent fuel is a subject familiar to neighbors of Exelon Nuclear's Limerick Generating Station. In 2007, ground was broken on a spent fuel facility that takes older, colder fuel from the plant's spent fuel pool and stores it in a dry cask storage system.

At the time it was built, that system was described by Exelon as temporary until the federal repository beneath Nevada's Yucca Mountain was completed.

But President Barack Obama made good on a campaign pledge to stop that project, leaving the future location of spent fuel storage in limbo.

What is not in limbo is including spent fuel storage, both in pools and in dry casks, in a "quicklook review" that the federal agency overseeing nuclear plants plans to take of the Limerick facili-

tv.

Neil Sheehan, a spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, has said that before the earthquake even struck Japan, his agency had planned to include the Limerick plant among those it intended to review for susceptibility to earthquake damage as the result of new geologic data about the region.

Since the Japanese disaster, NRC has agreed to Obama's request to do a 30-day "quick look" review of all 104 U.S. plants as well as a longer 90-day review.

"Spent fuel storage will certainly be encompassed by the 'quick-look' review as well as other lessons-learned assessments based on the Japan reactor events," Sheehan wrote in a March 23 e-mail answering questions posed by The Mercury.

It won't be the first time NRC has taken a look (See LIMERICK PLANT on A4)