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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Energy Minister Says 'No Threat' From Accident at Nuclear Plant

December 03, 2014



The Zaporizhye nuclear power plant.

KIEV — An accident at a nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhya in southeastern Ukraine poses no danger to health or the environment, energy authorities said Wednesday, an assessment later corroborated by the French nuclear institute IRSN.

Energy Minister Volodymyr Demchyshyn said the accident occurred Friday in one of the six blocks at Zaporizhzhya, Europe's largest nuclear power plant, and was caused by a short circuit in its power outlet system. The incident was "in no way" linked to power production, he told a news conference.

"There is no threat. ...There are no problems with the reactors," said Demchyshyn, who took up his post in a new government only on Tuesday. He added that he expected the plant to return to normal operations on Dec. 5.

An explosion and fire at Ukraine's Chernobyl power plant in 1986, the world's worst nuclear accident, was caused by human error and a series of blasts sent a cloud of radioactive dust

billowing across northern and western Europe.

France's public nuclear safety institute IRSN said it had not detected any unusual radioactivity in Ukraine after Friday's accident and that it presented no danger to the nearby population or environment.

The UN nuclear agency (IAEA) said it had been told by Ukraine that a reactor at the Zaporizhzhya plant remained safely shut down after a short circuit in its transformer yard last week, and that no radioactive materials had been released.

Ukraine, Belarus and Russia estimated the death toll from the disaster at Chernobyl at a few thousand while environmental group Greenpeace says the accident will eventually cause up to 93,000 extra cancer deaths worldwide.

Demchyshyn said the stricken block at Zaporizhzhya had been provisionally disconnected from the electro-energy system though its reactor continued to work normally. "Its power output is not being used. I think the problem will be resolved by Friday," he said.

Later on Wednesday, Ukraine's largest private energy firm DTEK said it had curbed power supplies to some industrial consumers and households in the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions in the east and to some in the capital Kiev in the west.

"The reason is a shortage of electricity" exacerbated by the Zaporizhzhya shutdown and dwindling coal reserves at Ukrainian thermal power plants, DTEK said in a statement. It said residential areas could be without power for several hours.

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