

Straight Talk About San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station Safety

Southern California Edison (SCE) responds to questions about the safety of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station.

Q1. Why have we heard so much during the past year about plant safety issues?

Nuclear plant workers must comply with literally thousands of rules, some with low-level safety significance, others with mid- or high-level significance. Although recent San Onofre safety violations have been classified as low-level, SCE considers them significant and unacceptable. SCE concluded two years ago that some plant leaders believed that maintaining the plant's strong historic safety record was adequate. In this industry, standards are continually rising. Maintaining your performance level means you are falling behind. As a result, SCE began restructuring San Onofre leadership.

Q2. Some violations don't sound low-level, such as a battery connection that was loose for years.

A nuclear plant performance deficiency is classified "low-level" if it has no direct, immediate impact on public safety. Multiple, overlapping safety systems protect San Onofre and the public. The failure of one, such as problems found with one of multiple back-up batteries, is taken very seriously but does not mean the public was unprotected.

Q3. Have any of San Onofre's performance issues caused injuries due to exposure to radioactivity?

No. In fact, no U.S. nuclear plant has ever caused a serious radiological injury, including the Three Mile Island facility in PA. While proud of the industry's record of operating safely, SCE believes it must earn the public's trust regarding San Onofre's safety every day.

Q4. What is SCE doing about these concerns?

Two years ago, Edison replaced the plant's top managers with outside industry leaders. These new senior managers restructured the site supervision structure, adding still more recognized industry leaders. Then the new management team put into place new worker standards, accountability systems and training programs. Measurable progress is being made. Our ultimate goal is a plant that exceeds industry standards.

Q5. Isn't it taking a long time to improve San Onofre's performance?

Yes. While there are clear indications that new plant standards are taking effect, SCE hoped to see more progress by now in the transition to new, higher performance standards. However, changing the understanding and approach of more than 2,000 workers requires time.

Q6. What else can SCE say to reassure the public about its commitment to public safety?

SCE requires professionals employed at San Onofre to be involved in a lifetime of nuclear training, continuously increasing their scientific knowledge.

SCE is constantly making San Onofre even safer by adding new technologies and practices to the overlapping measures that protect all safety-sensitive systems.

Every day, independent experts from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission monitor each aspect of San Onofre operations, holding management and workers accountable for public safety.

Most San Onofre employees live in nearby communities. As a result, they bring to their daily work a very personal motive for operating the plant in the safest manner possible.