

INTERNATIONAL
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Another nuclear leak in France

The Associated Press

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PARIS: Uranium-bearing liquid has leaked from a broken underground pipe at a nuclear plant in southeastern France, the national nuclear safety authority said Friday. It was the second leak discovered at a French site this month.

The Nuclear Safety Authority said experts were trying to determine how much leaked uranium was present at the plant, which is owned by the electricity company Areva.

Areva, which is owned by the French government, is at the forefront of President Nicolas Sarkozy's effort to sell home-grown nuclear energy technology to the rest of the world.

An Areva spokesman, Charles Hufnagel, said the leak of lightly enriched uranium did not spread outside the site in Romans-sur-Isère and had "absolutely no impact on the environment." He said the factory hoped the problem would be classified as Level 1, the most minor of seven possible.

Among all nations, France is the most dependent on nuclear power, with 59 reactors churning out nearly 80 percent of its electricity. The Nuclear Safety Authority said the pipe was believed to have ruptured several years ago. It added that the pipe "was not in line with the applicable regulations, which require shock resistance ability sufficient to avoid rupture."

News of the leak came just a day after the government ordered tests at all French nuclear power plants after Areva disclosed that liquid containing non-enriched uranium had been accidentally released from another site, in Tricastin. Areva said that problem "did not affect either the health of employees and local populations, or their environment."

The Nuclear Safety Authority has criticized Areva for the way it handled the leak at Tricastin, saying it delayed communication of the problem and had unsatisfactory security measures in place.

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